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MIKE SHAYNE
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY, 1961 Vol. 8, No. 6

COMPLETE SUSPENSE NOVEL

THE GORGEOUS MURDERER

by HENRY KANE

The man was irresistible to women and a remorseless killer, the blonde self-seeking and very dangerous. And what they planned to do was worse than murder.

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THE GORGEOUS MURDERER

by HENRY KANE

Neither the girl nor the man spoke the young bank teller's language. They were from another world—a world of stark criminal violence and sudden death. And their game was Russian roulette.

WHEN OSCAR BLINNEY became acquainted with Evangeline Ashley, that delectable young lady was on the brink of losing one lover and murdering another, although, at the time, she had not the faintest premonition of the impending imminence of either catastrophe. And, of course, Oscar Blinney was totally unaware of the pertinent gentlemen involved or of the gradual gathering of the uneventful events which would culminate in such twofold tragedy. It was March in Miami, last scented breeze-swept month of the dying winter season of that warm, golden, riotous, luxuriant, ocean-lapped resort.

Blinney had come down on the first day of March, and had met Evangeline Ashley that same afternoon. And they had had their first actual conversation—initiated, in point of fact, by Miss Ashley, since it was not the wont of Oscar Blinney to address himself to any strange young lady no matter how delectable.

On the first of March, Oscar Blinney had descended as per reservation upon the Hotel Cascade in Miami Beach, ocean-front and fashionable, but not too expensive at end of season, although "descended," usual as is such terminology, is woefully inaccurate as concerns Oscar Blinney, because,

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A THRILLING NEW CRIME SUSPENSE NOVEL

simply, Oscar Blinney never "descended" upon anything, anywhere. "Slithered" would be more descriptive but "slithered" also fails because Oscar Blinney was a muscular broad-shouldered six-feet-one and how can one apply "slithered" to a muscular broad-shouldered six-feet-one?

Let us put it this way: Oscar Blinney was shy, cautious, soft-spoken, and apologetic; his approach to anything, anywhere, always, was careful and diffident; it was as though the great bulk of muscular broad-shouldered six-feet-one trod tip-toe upon its own private carpet of foam-rubber; and it was always as though he were saying "Excuse me" before he said anything else. Carrying a battered suitcase in the great paw of his right hand, he egg-shelled to the ornate desk and said to the desk-clerk: "Blinney."

"Pardon?" said the clerk.

"Blinney," said Blinney.

"You have a reservation, sir?"

"I have," said Blinney.

"Just one moment, sir," said the clerk and rummaged amongst slips of paper and selected one and said, "Oh yes. Blinney, Oscar. Room 202. Please sign here."

He slid a large square card in front of Blinney, but it was more than signing; it was like filling out a questionnaire that would serve as foundation for a cumulative dossier. Blinney dropped his suitcase with a thud, inspected the card, read the questions, meticulously inscribed the answers, and returned the card to the clerk who smiled frozenly and thumped a bell.

A wizened little bell-boy, who looked like a long-retired jockey, appeared, hoisted the bag, and accepted the key from the desk-clerk.

"Mr. Blinney goes to 202," said the desk-clerk.

"What floor?" said Blinney.

"Two," said the desk-clerk and puckered a rosebud mouth.

Blinney looked toward a wide marble staircase.

"Walk or ride?" he inquired.

"Whatever is your pleasure," said the desk clerk and sniffed and turned to other matters.

"We ride," said the jockey. "Like it's a heavy bag you got here, Mr. Blinney."

Blinney undressed, unpacked, showered and considered. Then decided to dress in his new sports clothes and see something of Miami Beach.

He did not use the elevator. Instead, he walked to the end of the corridor and down the stairs. He noted, at the foot of the stairs, that the staircase led directly to one of the entrance doors, and that it was completely out of the range of vision of the desk and the elevators. He grinned as he contemplated that, wondering if the architect had so purposely constructed it. There was no door-

man. It was perfect for the secret rendezvous of lovers. Was this staircase, so situated, one of the features of the Hotel Cascade, an undeclared, unadvertised, word-of-mouth inducement for the patronage of paying guests?

He grinned. It was a charming, practical gambit, a definite advantage to such of the paying guests who required such advantage, whether or not it was so purposely designed. And he stepped out, unseen, into the street.

The air was warm and scented sweet and there was a breeze from the ocean. He breathed deeply, filled his lungs, looked about. To his left, above an arched doorway, the glass tubes of unlighted neons spelled out in curlicued script: CASCADE TEA ROOM. It was a place to eat and he was hungry but he delayed it as though by presentiment.

He decided to walk. He strolled about, looking in shop windows, enjoying the invigorating out-of-doors, and he returned in half an hour, famished. He entered directly into CASCADE TEA ROOM and he saw her at once and he stopped short as though hit.

He had moved from bright sunshine into small-bulbed dimness and as she stood there before him she seemed almost unreal. She was facing the street and her features were clear to him as the light of the sun caught at her piled-high taffy-gold hair like a nimbus. Her eyes were enormous, sheer blue and clear beneath sweeping graceful eyebrows; her face, smooth-skinned and lightly tan, was heart-shaped, the cheekbones high, the cheeks slightly hollow, the chin coming to a delicate point; her nose was tiny and imperious with small flaring nostrils; her mouth was full, curved, sensuous, and glistening, insouciant and somehow cruel. She was tall, deep-chested, long-legged, and full-figured, and as she came toward him erect and carriage high, she smiled with gleaming, even, high, white teeth.

"How many please?" There was the soft nuance of Southern accent. The voice was resonant, musical, and pitched low.

"Beg pardon?" said Blinney.

"How many please?"

"Well, there's just me . . ." He said it diffidently.

The smile broadened and there was a quiver at the nostrils. "Well, sometimes a party may be expecting others . . ."

"No, I'm not expecting anyone. Just me."

"This way, please."

She turned and he followed her, observing the movement of the rounded hips, looking at the full calves of her legs that narrowed to slender ankles. She wore a simple white short-skirted dress with a tight gold belt, sheer white stockings, and white high-heeled shoes. She led him to a booth,

laid a menu in front of him, inquired, "Is this all right?"

"Yes, thank you."

She waved to a waitress and went away.

Oscar Blinney, for the first time in his life overwhelmingly affected at the sight of a woman, found, nonetheless, that his appetite was unimpaired. He ordered orange juice, ham and eggs, and coffee, and for dessert, a second order of ham and eggs and a second cup of coffee. Then he paid his bill, tipped the waitress, nodded to the hostess, and departed.

He wandered through the streets of Miami Beach. He nibbled at drinks at various dim-lit bars and made no response to flirtatious eyes. He went to a movie. He came out of the movie and went to Club Columbo and watched the strippers. Some of them were quite beautiful, all of them salacious; he remained unmoved, unaffected, lonely, and alone.

He went back to the hotel, took off his clothes, lay out on the bed. He could not shake the image of the tall golden-haired girl in the white gold-belted dress.

He dozed.

II

EVANGELINE ASHLEY was going to her lover. She was going to her lover, William Grant, known as Bill, who lived on the second floor of a semi-fashionable apartment house on a semi-fashionable street, its curbs lined with parked cars, in a semi-fashionable neighborhood.

She arrived there at twenty minutes after eleven, giving no heed to the parked cars one of which was a sleek black Cadillac with a thick dark man seated at its wheel. She ran up one flight of wooden stairs and knocked upon a door marked 2A.

"Who is it?" said Bill Grant.

"Eve," said Evangeline Ashley.

"What the hell!" said Bill Grant and opened the door.

"Surprised?" said Evangeline Ashley.

"Knocked right on my fanny," said Bill Grant. "Don't you believe in calling?"

"It's your night off, isn't it?"

"So suppose I wasn't home?"

"Then I'd know you were out cheating, you ill-begotten son. Pour a drink for little Eve." He went lithely, gracefully, to a liquor cabinet, poured bourbon and added soda, and brought it to her. "Do you cheat on me?" she said.

"You bet I do," he said.

"Don't ever let me catch you."

"Nobody catches me when I cheat."

She drank of her drink, set it away, slipped out of her coat, took up the glass, and went to a divan. She drank again and placed the glass on an end-table. "Come here by me," she said softly.

"Take your time," Grant said.

"I'm burning," she said.

"It'll keep," he said.

She took up her drink again. "What have you been doing?"

"When?"

"Now. Before I came."

"Watching TV."

"Very exciting."

"Baby, I get my excitement when I'm *not* home. Home, I take it easy. What about Senor?" he said.

"The hell with Senor," Evangeline said.

"Baby, you're just begging for trouble, aren't you?"

"What's the matter? Are you afraid?"

"I'm afraid of nothing, and you know it."

"Are you afraid of Senor?"

"The hell with Senor."

"That's what I said. So why are you bugging me with Senor?"

He gulped bourbon again. "Because you got a good thing there. Why spoil it?"

"For you I'd spoil anything."

"Sure. You spoil it with Senor and you spoil it for me too, you stupid fool. Suppose he decided to come visit you tonight?"

"So what?" she flared. "What am I? A prisoner? A slave? So I went for a walk, so I went to a movie, so I went out for a drink, so I went to a girl friend." She subsided. "Come over here to me, Billy-boy."

"You're beautiful," he said. "You're gorgeous. But you're an awful chump."

"Why? Because I go for you?"

"That's exactly why."

"I couldn't agree more. You're a disease."

"Diseases are curable."

"Not this disease."

"Cut it out," he said. "If I told you once, I told you a million times. Bill Grant is temporary, a temporary guy. Bill Grant has got things to do, a big score to make. Two, three times in my life, I almost made it, but it slipped by. Okay. I'm not discouraged. I'm right in there, seeking, looking, angling all the time. I'm looking for a big score and I'll make it."

"Sure you will, Billy-boy."

"This trick in Miami, it's a stopover. Working here for Senor who thinks he's a big shot, it's a stopover. You? You're a stopover. They want me back in Havana and I might go. I'm looking for the big score. Maybe I'll even go back to London. I've got some friends who are doing pretty fair there. But I'm surely not a guy to have a chick hanging on to his coat-tails. Now why don't you get that through your head?"

"You're not going anywhere yet, are you?"

"No."

"And I haven't been in your way, have I?"

"No."

"And I've been helping out pretty fair, haven't I?"

"Yes," said Grant.

"Do you love me, Billy?"

"No."

"Do you like me?"

"Yes."

"Then come over here by me. Now. Right now. Please."

"Beg."

"I'm begging."

"That's the only way you like it —when you beg. And the only guy you go for—is a guy you've got to beg."

"Only you, Billy. I never begged before. The other way around. They begged me. They still beg. And I never felt anything for any one of them. Only you, Billy."

He turned the switch of a small table-lamp. A blue light flickered faintly. He snapped off all the other lights and in the blue dimness he went to her. "Hold me tight," she whispered.

THE DARK MAN in the black car sat motionless, his eyes on the windows of the second floor apartment. When the lights went out he flinched, grunted; then he sat motionless again, rigid. After fifteen minutes, he started the car. It pulled out with a lurch, roared forward, settled to normal speed. He drove smoothly, observing all the traffic regulations. He parked the car one block from the Hotel Cascade, and walked the rest of the way.

He was a tall, powerful, thick-set man with kinky black hair, grey at the temples. His name was Pedro Orgaz but all of Miami knew him as Senor. He entered Hotel Cascade through the door at the foot of the stairs, and walked up quickly and silently.

He opened the door of 203 with his own key, locked the door behind him, and stood still in the dark, recovering his breath. Then he switched on all the lights. He searched the room, removing anything that might connect him to the premises, no matter how remotely. There was not much. He did not keep clothes there. He picked up two packets of matches and pocketed them. They carried the stamp of Club Columbo and he was the owner of Club Columbo.

He searched through all the drawers of a dresser and a table. He found a picture of himself and Evangeline Ashley taken one afternoon when they were out on a fishing trip. He slipped the picture into his jacket pocket. He found an envelope from Club Columbo, one envelope. He was giving Evangeline Ashley a thousand dollars a month. On the first day of each month he brought her a thousand dollars in cash. He was a married man and dared not write checks to a woman he was keeping.

On the first day of each month he brought a thousand dollars in cash in an envelope. Sometimes

he would leave the cash and take the envelope, sometimes he left the cash with the envelope. Each envelope bore the imprint of Club Columbo. There was no risk involved. Anybody could have an envelope from Club Columbo. But for what he was now planning, he wanted no vestige of any connection with himself in that room. There was but one envelope. He slipped that into his pocket beside the picture.

He searched the room again, very carefully. There was nothing in it that pertained to Pedro Orgaz. He went to a small table on which there were many bottles of whiskey. He selected a bottle of Canadian Club, uncorked the bottle, and drank the raw whiskey directly from its mouth. He corked the bottle and replaced it.

Then he drew a large silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and mopped his face. Then, painstakingly, he wiped every item and every area of the room where his fingerprints may have been impressed. Then, handkerchief in hand, he switched off the lights, wiped the doorknob and turned it, wiped the outside doorknob, and locked the door.

He had left the room exactly as he had found it. An expert would not have known anyone had been there, let alone Evangeline Ashley. He went down the stairs quietly and out into the street and walked quickly to his car. He

drove to his club and assumed his normal duties as owner and host; normal, except that he was morose, preoccupied, and he was drinking.

Usually, Senor Pedro Orgaz did not drink when at work. This night he drank and he did not stop drinking.

III

ON THAT THIRD day of March, at ten o'clock in the evening, Pe-

dro Orgaz sat in his office at the Upstairs Room, drumming his fingers upon the desk-top. A half-empty bottle of Canadian Club stood on the desk near the drumming fingers, as did a sizable shot-glass. Senor was waiting for Bill Grant. He poured whiskey into the shot-glass, gulped, and made his third phone call within the past half hour.

"Everything okay?" he said into the phone.

"Sure, for Chrissake. What's with the phone calls? What's with so nervous?"

"I just want to be sure."

"You can be sure, big brother."

"Do it slow. Make it last. A long, slow job. You know?"

"Leave it to Little Dee. Little Dee is going to enjoy."

There was a knock on the door.

Senor hung up.

"Who?" he called.

"Bill Grant."

"Come in. Come in."

Grant entered, smiled. "Check me in, Senor."

"Billy."

Grant continued to smile as he crossed the office to the desk. "Yes."

"You got a job to do for me, Billy."

"Yes, Senor?"

"Little Dee is sick. Caught up with one of them little bugs or something. Just called up. He was supposed to bring the loot for the till for tonight. We got a little but we need plenty more. He's over by his cottage. You know where Little Dee's cottage is."

"Of course I do. We've had some pretty good parties there, haven't we? Little Dee's a bachelor who knows how to live."

"Would you like a drink, Billy-boy?" Senor asked.

"Too early for me."

Senor had a drink. He wiped his hand across his mouth. "Okay. You go over to Little Dee. He's got fifty thou over there for the bank here. Go over and pick it up. He's waiting for you. Bring it back here and we break it up for the tables. And don't get lost with my fifty thou."

"That crazy I'm not, Senor.

"I know, Billy-boy. You're too smart to be stupid. Now come on. Get moving."

"Twenty minutes, pal," Grant said. He went out, closing the door quietly.

Senor had another drink, sat drumming the desk-top. In an hour, and it would be done. In an hour, it would be finished. In an hour, Little Dee would have had his fun, and would be out to sea, and he, Senor, could quit this office and have the pleasure of finishing the job. He looked at his watch. One hour. One hour . . .

Pedro Orgaz was fifty-three years of age. He was a Spanish-American, born in Montreal, who had married a woman of wealth,

and transferred his criminal activities to the United States.

He owned one of the most lucrative gambling setups in Miami and his brother, Little Dee, was his second in command. Senor had grown to be a big man in the town, a rich and solid citizen. His wife had borne him three sons in quick succession, and within ten years he had amassed a fortune of his own. He had his affairs, but always discreetly, and unsuspected by his wealthy wife. He hand-picked his girl-friends. He propositioned them and if they agreed he paid them liberally.

He used them until he tired of them, and when he did, he dismissed them with an enormous gift of money and a plane ticket for a faraway city. His respectability had to be guarded at all costs; his wife must continue to think him faithful, devoted to her alone. He dared not risk a divorce court exposure, with all that would follow in its wake. His wife had powerful friends and relations.

He never had any difficulty with any of his girls. He never suffered embarrassment from any of his passing amours. The girls, on their part, understood their situation. Nobody had held a club to them. They knew with whom they were dealing. Senor Pedro Orgaz. A big man, a rich man, an important man, an owner of an illegal gambling casino, and consequently a dangerous man. He had never had embarrassment—until Evangeline Ashley.

Too frequently, she was not there when he called. He had his moments and he came when he pleased. Too frequently late evenings, she was not there. Too frequently, afternoons, on her days off, she was not there. He did not equate these times with Bill Grant's days off (two each week); he had not the remotest idea of any relationship between Bill Grant and Evangeline Ashley; he did not think of Bill Grant at all in this personal quandary. But he did, at length, become suspicious of Evangeline Ashley. He was, at this time of his life, almost prudent; a man of fierce pride, he was, at this time of his life, slow to wrath; but a niggling pique had begun to eat within him.

He wanted to know but there was no one he could trust for the assignment except Little Dee, and he had to tell Little Dee, and Little Dee's amused cynical expressions of sentiment added flame to the pique. Little Dee was out on watch and Little Dee reported—Bill Grant.

Senor could not believe. Senor had to see for himself. And Senor saw for himself and flaming pique burst into killing fury, long-quiescent. They were laughing at him—and their laughter, unheard, was heard by him, and his stomach coiled in hate. Like all of the ignorant and unlearned, swelled to

pomposity, he had a dread and a hatred of being laughed at.

And they were laughing at him; the dapper, superior, smooth-talking Bill Grant was laughing at him; the cold, contemptuous superior college-girl was laughing at him. They would laugh on the other side of their faces. Fury became final and implacable. A violent nature needed release. And now Senor was drinking whiskey in his office and drumming fingertips on a desk-top . . .

ON THE THIRD DAY of March, at ten minutes after ten of a humid moonless night, Bill Grant drove a black Cadillac onto the concrete driveway of Diego Orgaz's ocean-front cottage by the sea in Miami Beach. He pulled up the brake, turned off the motor, switched off the lights, squirmed out of the car, slammed the car-door, walked lightly to the front door of the cottage, and touched his finger to the door-bell. At once Little Dee opened the door.

"Hi, Billy," he said.

"Senor sent me for the cabbage."

"Yeah, yeah, come in, come in." Grant entered into a small foyer. Little Dee turned the lock on the door. "In the study," he said. "You know the way. You been here before."

"How do you feel Little Dee?"

"Fair. Caught up with one of them bugs."

Little Dee wore brown moccasins, brown slacks, and a brown Basque shirt. In the roomy, pine-panelled study, Little Dee used a key to lock the door and dropped the key into a pocket of his slacks.

"Senor wants me back in twenty minutes," said Bill Grant.

"Maybe it'll take a little longer."

"Senor said twenty minutes."

"Okay. Okay." Little Dee went to a desk, opened a drawer, and brought out an automatic.

"What the hell goes?" said Bill Grant.

"It will take more than twenty minutes," said Little Dee.

"You out of your mind?"

"*You're* out of your mind, Billy-boy." Little Dee pointed the gun and came close to Bill Grant. Little Dee's face was shining. Perspiration ran along the sides of his broken nose. His teeth gleamed in a happy smile. "It ain't nice to make out with Senor's girl. Senor don't like it when a couple of double crossers laugh at him."

"Who's laughing?"

"You and that college-girl hooker, that's who's laughing. But you ain't going to laugh no more, Billy-boy. Little Dee is going to break you up into a lot of little pieces, but nice and slow and easy, and you're going to cry and cry. How's it sound, Billy-boy?"

"Peachy," said Bill Grant.

"And after I break you up a little bit, and cut you up a little bit, and you cry and cry, Little Dee is

going to feel sorry for you, and put you out of your goddamn misery. Then Little Dee will wrap you up nice and comfy and take you out to the boat."

Little Dee was close to Bill Grant. Little Dee towered above Bill Grant. Little Dee was an experienced torturer and an experienced murderer but Bill Grant was no slob in either department himself. Bill Grant tensed himself and watched carefully.

"What boat?" said Bill Grant.

"The boat like what will be your hearse," said Little Dee.

Bill Grant watched. He did not have to jump Little Dee because Little Dee was not going to murder him, yet. To jump Little Dee would be an act of desperation, because Little Dee was obviously stronger, and Bill Grant could lose.

"Like how a boat for a hearse?" said Bill Grant.

"After I break you up a little bit, and cut you up a little bit, and you cry instead of laugh, and I put you out of your misery, I take you out to the boat, and I wrap chains all around you, and I take you way out to the deep, and I drop you in, and you sink, and the fishes will eat what's left of you. Nice, huh?"

"Peachy," said Bill Grant.

"So you want to laugh now, baby?"

Bill Grant watched. The gun twisted in the massive hand, held like a hammer now, butt protruding. Bill Grant's face assumed a look of fear; he turned as though to run. The hand swiftly rose and fell in a powerful hammer-chop directed at Bill Grant's head.

Bill Grant moved his head, just enough, as expert as an expert boxer; he let the gun hit, a sliding blow without effect, and now guile was added to his act. He screamed and fell and lay quivering and he heard the gritting laughter above him.

As Little Dee bent for a second chop, Bill Grant's foot shot out in a crushing kick to the testicles, and as the big man fell back, grunting, Bill Grant was upon him, his switch-knife in his hand, and he plunged a six-inch blade into Little Dee's groin, and cut upward, all the way to the diaphragm, and gas exploded from Little Dee's stomach, and blood lumped the Basque shirt in a curious reddening bulge.

Little Dee stood quite still for a moment, teeth gleaming in a death-grin, no pain in his face, nothing but an expression of pure, almost child-like, surprise. The gun fell first. Then Little Dee fell, supine. And Bill Grant was upon him, stomping his high heels into the expression of surprise, stomping until there was no expression, until there was almost no face.

He stood still, red knife in hand. He breathed deeply until he recovered his wind. Then he laid the knife on the floor and turned the

faceless man over. He took the key from the pocket of the slacks, went to the door, unlocked it, returned, threw the key on the floor, and picked up the dripping knife.

He went through a corridor to the bathroom where, first, he washed the knife. He dried it on a bath towel, folded it, and replaced it in the pocket where he always carried it. Then he removed his jacket and shirt and washed himself thoroughly. He combed his hair, re-dressed, went back to the study, skirted the dead man, and explored the desk-drawers for money. Of course there was no money. He left all the lights burning and went out to the car.

He drove to his apartment and packed quickly. He took sixteen hundred dollars from its hiding place in a closet and placed it into his wallet. He turned off the lights, went back to the car, and drove to the airport. He spread a bit of bribe-money, talked about an emergency involving an acutely ill mother, and procured a ticket to Havana on a flight that was leaving in forty-five minutes. Then he went to a booth and made a phone call.

IV

ON THE THIRD DAY of March, at seven minutes to eleven of a humid moonless evening, Evangeline Ashley sat in a soft chair in Room 203 of Hotel Cascade reading a three-paragraph gossip-column on a back page of a daily newspaper.

She was nearing the end of the last paragraph when the phone rang. She laid the paper aside and went to the telephone. She was wearing a grey gabardine suit, grey stockings, black patent-leather pumps, and a frilly-fronted white blouse. She lifted the receiver and said, "Yes??"

"Eve? This is Bill."

"What's the matter? What—"

"Shut up. Listen. I'm at the airport."

"You're *where*. . . ?"

"Airport. I'm leaving soon. Next forty minutes—"

"For where?"

"Havana. Now shut up. Listen to me, will you please? Get into your car and drive out here. Fast. No time for fooling around. Hang up, get into your car, and drive out here. Important. I'm waiting. Bye now."

He hung up. She hung up. She turned off the lights, left the room, locked the door, ran down the stairs, ran to the garage, got into her powder-blue convertible, and drove without event to the airport.

She parked, ran in, and he was there waiting. He took her to an uncrowded spot and told her what had happened.

"Take me with you," she said. "Please take me."

"Forget it."

"I love you, Bill."

"Forget it."

"Will you send for me?"

"No. Now look, you're in a spot."

"I'm in no spot."

"Senor."

"I can handle him."

"I don't think you can. That creep has popped his cork, I tell you. And when he finds out what happened to Little Dee, he'll really flip."

"I can handle him."

"But he knows about us."

"He hasn't seen us together, has he? He hasn't seen us in bed, has he? So he knows we've been out together. So he knows I came visiting you. So he knows, even, that I stayed over. I can talk him out of all of that. I'm a woman. He's a man. I can handle him."

He drew out his wallet, pinched out money. "Here's three hundred bucks. Pack up and git. You can always take out the five thousand you have in the Savings Bank by mail or something." She held back. "Take it," he said. She took the money. He put his wallet away. "That's my advice. Pack up and blow. Tonight."

"I told you I can handle him," she insisted.

"Look." He talked rapidly, quietly. "I gave a guy his lumps tonight. I'm running. I'm hot. I figure to be hot for quite a while. Even if I wanted you, I wouldn't let you come with me. I'll be moving around, like looking over my shoulder. For a while, anyway. Until it simmers down. Even if I wanted you, I wouldn't let you come. And I don't want you. It's been nice, but I've had it. I'm a loner. I'm a loner, looking for the big score. I've got to go my own way, and I've got to go unhampered. That's it. I don't like long good-byes. I'm going to turn around and walk away. You go back to your car."

"Billy, please."

"Honey, there's a dead man around, and I killed him. It may blow up big, it may not blow up at all, depending on whether Senor pipes. If it blows big, there'll be cops looking for me. They inquire at airports. There's no sense somebody seeing us and tying you into it. There's no sense in your being an accessory. I don't want you hanging around here with me. Good-bye, Evie."

"Billy, say one nice word."

"Good-bye, baby."

"Billy, do you love me?"

"No."

He turned and walked, gracefully, on his high heels, into gloom. She restrained an impulse to run after him. You did not run after Bill Grant. You did not make scenes with Bill Grant. You gave him all the love you were capable of. You gave him money to nurture his expensive tastes. You held him and you made love to him and he made love to you, but you knew all the while he was gossamer, you had no sense of pos-

session, you knew one day he would go away. Now he was going away.

She returned to her car and drove back to town. She had coffee in Wolfie's and thought of her own problem. She was certain she could handle Senor. Her body and her beauty could manage Senor, as they had managed so many others, excluding Bill Grant. Her approach to Senor must be one of outrage: he had doubted her when he should not have. She, of course, would know nothing of what had occurred. He would accuse, and she would quickly, openly, honestly defend.

Of course, she had been seeing Bill Grant. Love? Love affair? Don't be silly. The poor guy was sick, impotent, on the verge of a nervous breakdown—there could be no love affair with Bill Grant. She had been as a mother to him, as a sister, as a nurse; the man was in the throes of a psychopathological melancholy; she had even stayed over with him on occasion, actually to prevent a suicide.

She would have to think it all out, think clearly, and she was far too upset and confused to think clearly now. She parked the car and ran up the stairs. She needed a drink. She needed a few drinks, badly. Then she would run a warm bath and rest and soak and try to relax and try to think. She opened the door, closed it behind her, switched on the lights, but she did not lock the door.

Instead, she stood silent, gaping, body rigid, mouth working, and the key slipped from limp fingers without a sound to the carpet.

Senor was there. He was seated, fat knees spread, in an armchair. The kinky hair was dishevelled. There were deep lines in the flushed face. Perspiration gleamed in globules in the sockets of the eyes. The mouth was tight. The nostrils were dilated, gleet on the upper lip. The protruding eyes were red and raging. The hands were encased in black silk gloves.

He rose, and he moved toward her, and she moved away, and he circled, moving toward her, and she backed away, all assurance drained from her. She knew now she could not handle him. He was beyond handling. His eyes were insane. His breathing was rapid and raucous. He moved toward her, black hands outstretched.

"No. Don't," she said. "No, please, Senor, don't."

He stopped, black hands outstretched. Thickly he said, "Yes, do, Senor. Do. Do."

She had moved away from him step by step, until the back of her legs touched the liquor table. Her hands were behind her. Her right hand felt a bottle, crept stealthily to its neck, and grasped it.

"No!', she said. "No, Senor! I beg you! No!"

"Laugh, you little tramp! Laugh

at Senor! Laugh, now! Laugh, till my hands come to you, and I choke out the laughter!"

"You're drunk."

"So what?"

"You're making a mistake."

"No mistake."

"They'll get you."

"Who? Bill Grant?"

"Cops."

"Never. I got no connection with you."

"You have. They'll get you."

"Never. Nobody seen me come. Nobody'll see me go. I choke until you're dead. I leave you here and it's finished. Another cheap broad gets knocked off. There's a million of them. I got no connection. Now, laugh, tramp. Die laughing."

"You're drunk." He moved. "No Wait!"

He moved forward. He was drunk. He stumbled.

She lashed out with all her strength. She was young, and strong. The bottle, weapon-held, came from behind in a high, swift, terrifying arc, descending full upon the left side of the head. The bottle burst, inundating the head and face with running, seeping, caustic-smelling whiskey, quickly mixed with blood; the kinky hair opened, mangled, to a fracture of the skull, blood bubbling from a deep fissure of splintered bone in a high geyser, splashing the face; the eyes were blinded with blood and whiskey; but still he did not fall.

From deep in his chest came a babble of gasping, retching profanity, and he moved, forward, slowly, blindly, black hands extended. And now she waited, crouched, sobbing, taut, right hand gripped to the broken, jagged, lethal bottle-neck, and as the hands touched her, she thrust it into his throat and tore sideways, and the red-purple jugular blood spurted streaming, staining her. And still he stood; and then the black hands dropped; and he sighed; and he fell; and she went down to her knees, almost upon him, fighting for consciousness.

So they remained, for minutes, in tableau, and then she straightened to her feet, dropped the bottle-neck, and stood looking down upon him, without pity, licking her lips, swallowing, thinking.

Abruptly she lifted her skirt and kneeled beside him. She removed the black silk gloves, folded them, and stuffed them into a pocket of his jacket. She drew a long deep breath, lowered her head, placed her mouth against the dead sunken mouth, and firmly rubbed her lips to his. She stood up, gaping, sucking air, crunching back nausea. Recovered, she looked down at the bloody face. Lipstick was a shapeless imprint on the mouth.

She went to a mirror and looked upon herself. She was drawn, livid, her lipstick smeared, the pupils of her eyes contracted to tiny points. Watching her reflection,

she put her hands to her hair and pulled until it hung straggly, disarranged, and tousled. Watching her reflection, she tore at the jacket of her suit until it ripped and came apart; tore at the blouse until it rent; tore at her brassier until a strap burst and it hung awry at her middle.

As a slattern, clothing torn, hair hanging, full bosom exposed, she turned from the mirror, kicked over a chair, rumpled the covers of the bed, and went again to the dead Senor, and knelt beside him. She clasped the back of his right hand in hers, made a claw of his hand, and ripped his fingernails down one naked shoulder and breast, ripped until blood oozed from long welts, and the skin of her flesh was beneath his blunt nails.

She dropped the hand, stood up, and returned to the mirror. She looked upon the ragged bleeding scratches in the soft flesh, saw her reflection blur as the tears came to her eyes, and she smiled, frightfully, in hysteria. Her mouth opened, her lips contorted, and she screamed, frantically.

She screamed . . . Screamed. Screamed.

V

ON THE THIRD DAY of March, at five minutes before midnight of a hot humid moonless night, Oscar Blinney lay spread in bed in Room 202 raptly reading a paperback mystery novel. He lay, uncovered, nude except for boxer shorts, legs apart, heels dug to mattress, pillows piled beneath his head.

When the first scream penetrated, he swung up, sitting bolt-upright, scowling, blinking, uncertain as to whether or not he had imagined it.

The screams came, fierce, piercing, hideous. He flung away the book, leaped from the bed. The screams were from 203. He ran to the closet, dragged down a bathrobe; running, he pulled it on, burst out of his room, pounded on the door of 203, tried the knob, opened the door, slammed it shut behind him, quickly took in the scene in the brightly lighted room. It was as if she did not recognize him, even though she had met him in the tea room. It was as if he were a complete stranger to her, a man without a clear-cut identity.

She saw him, looked at him, looked through him—screaming, screaming—mascara making dirty blue-black lines of the tears on the wet face. He crossed, grasped her shoulders, shook her. She slobbered, laughed violently, gasped, choked.

He slapped her, hard, across the cheek, and she fell to the bed, face down, whimpering. He went to the phone, lifted the receiver, said, "Quick! Send a doctor to room two hundred three! And call the police! Quick!"

THE MAN IN CHARGE was Andrew Borrelli, lieutenant of detectives, young, deeply-tanned, quiet, competent, and sympathetic. He waited, while the doctor examined Pedro Orgaz and pronounced him dead. He waited, while the doctor attended to the scratches on the body of Evangeline Adams. He waited, while the doctor injected a sedative into the body of Evangeline Adams.

"Not too much, Doc," he said. "I've got to talk with her."

"Don't teach me my trade," said the doctor. "I know."

He waited, while police photographers took pictures. He waited, while the body of Pedro Orgaz was carried out. He waited, while Evangeline Ashley, in the bathroom, washed her face, composed herself, and changed to a housecoat. He waited, while, during that period, Oscar Blinney told him why and how he was in the room when the police arrived. He waited, until the doctor departed, until the uniformed policemen were gone—with two of them stationed outside the door.

He waited until Oscar Blinney was seated and Evangeline Ashley was seated, smoking a cigarette held in trembling fingers. Then he said, "All right, Miss Ashley, let's have it, if you please."

"Yes," she said, gulping. "Yes."

He led her, easily, quietly. "Let's just give it a fast run-through, huh? Mr. Blinney here

tells me your name is Evangeline Ashley. A very pretty name indeed."

"Thank you."

"My name is Borrelli, Lieutenant Borrelli. You're a resident of this hotel, Miss Ashley, aren't you? Here? This room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you work, Miss Ashley?"

"Yes. Here. Downstairs."

"In the hotel?"

"In the tea room. I'm a hostess in the tea room."

"And . . . the deceased . . . did you know him?"

"Yes, sir, I knew him."

"His name?"

"Orgaz. Pedro Orgaz."

"Know his occupation?"

"He owned . . . owned . . . Club Columbo."

"You feel all right, Miss Ashley?"

"Uh . . . yes, sir . . . yes, sir, I do."

"Would you like a drink, Miss Ashley?"

"Yes. I mean, may I?"

"Of course." He smiled. "This is not an inquisition, Miss Ashley. You're going to give me a statement of the facts, what happened here, a sort of preliminary statement. After that, we'll go downtown and you'll give us a formal statement. After that, and after consultation with the man from the prosecutor's office, we either hold you and you get yourself a lawyer, or we release you, and you still get yourself a lawyer. Now it is my duty to inform you that whatever you say may be held against you. It is also my duty to inform you that if you wish you may say nothing. Up to you."

"I've nothing to hide."

"Very good, Miss Ashley. May I prepare your drink?"

"May I do it myself?"

"Why, certainly."

She rose, poured bourbon into a tumbler, went to the bathroom to add water.

"How about you, Mr. Blinney?" said Lieutenant Borrelli.

"No, nothing, thanks," said Blinney.

She returned, sat down, drank, set the glass away.

"All right, then," said Lieutenant Borrelli. "You say you knew Mr. Orgaz, knew he owned Club Columbo. Were you well acquainted with Mr. Orgaz?"

"No."

"Fairly well acquainted?"

"No."

"How well acquainted, Miss Ashley?"

"I once worked for him."

"Ah, so. You once worked for him. When, please? For how long, please?"

"It was in November, early November. I worked for him for about two weeks."

"In what capacity?"

"I was . . . a sort of waitress at Club Columbo."

Lieutenant Borrelli coughed. "Waitresses at Club Columbo? You sure you weren't . . . er . . . a dancer?"

"Waitress."

"But there are only waiters at Club Columbo."

"This wasn't in the club proper. I worked in the Upstairs Room. You know, where they gamble."

"No, I *don't* know. Is this some sort of private club, the Upstairs Room?"

"Maybe. I'm not sure."

"All right, you worked as a waitress in the Upstairs Room in November for about two weeks. Were you fired?"

"I quit."

"Why?"

"He got fresh."

"Who?"

"Mr. Orgaz."

Lientenant Borrelli smiled. "You happen to be a very beautiful young woman, Miss Ashley. Getting fresh is a relative term. If you'll pardon me, you naturally inspire 'getting fresh.' I myself, if I met you under different circumstances, might . . . 'get fresh.'"

She smiled, for the first time. Blinney admired the adroit, easy manner of the soft-speaking young lieutenant. "Yes," she said. "Of course. A relative term. But he really got fresh. He made some real nasty passes, and some real nasty propositions. It got to a point where I just couldn't work there. I quit."

"I see," said Borrelli.

"But the moment I quit, he became contrite, almost nice. It was as though he suddenly realized that I simply wasn't the type. He practically implored me to return to work, that he wouldn't bother me, but I had had enough of it. Then he insisted upon helping me find a new job. He told me to apply for work as hostess in the tea room downstairs, even told me that he'd arranged that I could have a room in the hotel. It was as though he had made a mistake and wanted to make it up to me. And, in a way, I felt sorry for him. I felt I had misjudged him. I got both the job and the room."

"You saw him?"

"No. Not once. We talked on the phone. That's all."

"Didn't see him once until tonight?"

"That's right. I appreciated what he had done for me, but that was it. He called me once or twice, for a date, but I refused."

"And then—tonight?"

She tapped out the cigarette. "I was here," she said. "It was about eleven o'clock or so. I had a couple of drinks; I was sitting around reading the paper. I got restless. I got my car and drove over to Wolfie's. I had coffee and a bun, sat around, then came back here."

"What time?"

"I'm not sure. I'd say about a quarter to twelve."

"Yes?"

"I was about to take a shower and go to bed when there was a knock on the door."

"Yes?"

"It was Mr. Orgaz. He said, through the door, that it was important, that he was in some sort of trouble, that, please, he wanted to talk to me. I let him in."

"What happened then, Miss Ashley?"

"He was drunk, terribly drunk. He babbled some incoherent non-

sense for a few moments, and then he came after me. I was frightened to death. I ran for the door, but he caught me. I tried to fight him off. He was mad, drunk, insane. He tore at me, ripped at me, all the while cursing, saying horrible, frightful things. I was wild with fear. He pulled at my clothes, grabbed me, kissed me. I broke away. He was after me.

"I snatched up a bottle and I hit him over the head. The bottle broke to pieces but still he came. He was on me, on top of me, and I slashed out with what was left of the bottle in my hand. And then he dropped to the floor. And that's it. I know I screamed. I know I was hysterical. I know Mr. Blinney was suddenly here in the room, and I know he slapped me, I know he slapped me, and I thank him . . ." And she was sobbing. And she put her hands to her face.

The young lieutenant looked toward Blinney, shook his head, looked away. He went to Evangeline Ashley and lightly touched her head with an open comforting palm. "Miss Ashley," he said, "I'm not married, but I have four sisters. If you're telling the truth, whatever you did, I compliment you for it."

She looked up with wet, beseeching eyes. "I'm telling the truth."

"All right. Please get dressed. You too, Mr. Blinney. Go to your room and get some clothes on. We're going downtown. Make a bundle of the clothes you were wearing, Miss Ashley. We're taking them with us. They are, as a matter of fact, evidence in your favor."

Oscar Blinney went to his room and got dressed. Lieutenant Andrew Borrelli collected the bottleneck and fragments of the broken whiskey bottle and tied them into a neat package within a clean towel. Evangeline Ashley dressed, combed her hair, put lipstick to her lips, and brought the clothes she had been wearing, in a small suitcase, to Lieutenant Borrelli. Together, the three went "downtown."

There, under crisp, expert questioning by the Man From The Prosecutor's Office, Blinney's story and Evangeline Ashley's story were reduced to sworn signed statements. Scrapings of skin from Miss Ashley were compared to scrapings from beneath the fingernails of Pedro Orgaz by sleepy police technicians, and sampling of Miss Ashley's lipstick was compared to the smears on the mouth of the dead man. Additional photographs were taken of Miss Ashley's shoulder and breast wounds by suddenly-wide-awake police technicians. An autopsy was ordered upon the body of the deceased.

At 5:05 A.M. Miss Evangeline Ashley was released upon her own recognizance, on direct instruc-

tions from the Prosecutor's office. She was accompanied home by Mr. Oscar Blinney.

VI

ON THE MORNING OF the fifth day of March, the last will and testament of Pedro Orgaz, a strange document, was offered and admitted to probate. It was concise and unambiguous. Whatever he owned he devised and bequeathed to his wife, Theresa Columbo Orgaz. He specifically ordered that upon his death there be no services, no funeral, and no attendance, not even by his wife or children.

The preliminary hearing of Evangeline Ashley went smoothly, quickly, politely and co-operatively, without rancor or dispute. Oscar Blinney testified to the screams; and what he saw when he entered Room 203. He testified further that he had called for a doctor and for the police. He was shown the torn clothing and identified them as the clothing Miss Ashley had been wearing when he entered the room.

Lieutenant Andrew Borrelli testified that the police had arrived with a police physician and that there had been no need for the services of a private doctor. He gave his version of the scene in the room and introduced the evidence the bottle-neck and the fragments of the broken bottle. He corroborated Mr. Blinney's testimony with regard to the torn clothing.

Evangeline Ashley told her story, bearing up superbly, and shedding only a tear or two. The police physician testified to the condition of the deceased and the condition of Miss Ashley with emphasis upon the scratches on her shoulder and bosom. A police photographer authenticated photographs of the wounds upon the body of Miss Ashley. A police technician testified that sampling of Miss Ashley's lipstick compared exactly with the lipstick-smears on the mouth of the deceased.

Another police technician testified that scrapings of skin from the body of Miss Ashley were identical with the scrapings from beneath the fingernails of the deceased. An expert from the police laboratory gave testimony that autopsy disclosed sufficient alcohol in the stomach and blood of the deceased to substantiate a judgment of thorough intoxication.

And then there was introduced into the record four separate certified copies of convictions in the criminal history of the deceased from the files of the Canadian police.

Complete acquittal of Evangeline Ashley was a foregone conclusion from the first . . .

And they were inseparable—Evangeline Ashley and Oscar Blinney. He was with her morning, noon, and evening. He was con-

sumed by her, his attentions completely enveloped.

They swam together, walked together, went on trips together, went to restaurants together, went to clubs together, ate together, and drank together. He marveled at her resilience; within a few days she had bounced back; she was gay, smiling, bantering, beautiful. True, she drank a great deal, but after what she had been through, could he blame her? He himself was drinking much more than was his custom.

They were together morning, noon, and evening, and at night he was filled with wild dreams of her. He was certain that she responded to him, physically, although she had made no overt act. He had not kissed her, not once. His innate shyness, the timidity that was so much a part of his nature, smothered and enshackled him. He suffered, and his dreams grew wilder.

On the thirteenth day of March, Evangeline Ashley sold her car. She had inserted an advertisement in a newspaper and a buyer had eventuated. The buyer got a good buy. He paid $3200 for a "used" car which had been purchased four months prior for $5200, the "use" of which had entailed the driving of 2800 miles. The car, in fact, was brand new, but Evangeline Ashley was jubilant. She had asked $3200 and had received $3200.

"Oz," she said, "tonight we *really* do the town."

"Great by me," said Oscar Blinney.

"On me," said Evangeline Ashley.

"Pardon?" said Blinney.

"On me," said Evangeline Ashley. "Oz, you've been a brick, just wonderful to me. I don't think I've ever known anyone as considerate and kind. And it's been costing you, pal. Well, tonight, the party's on me."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about two hundred dollars. I'm putting three thousand in my Savings Bank, which shall give me a grand total of eight thousand, but the remaining two hundred bucks—tonight we blow it. The party's on me, and I don't want to hear another word out of you."

"I think that's silly."

"That's the trouble with you. You won't ever be silly. You're just too damned serious. Now just listen, and listen carefully. Me? I'm going to the bank, and then I'm going to the beauty parlor, and I don't want to see you for the rest of the day. Rest, lounge, swim, do as you like. At ten o'clock this evening, you'll call for me, like a boy-friend, you know?

"You won't have a long way to go, but, very formal, you'll call for me. You will have a beautiful orchid for me, and you'll be wearing dinner clothes. You're a real

handsome guy, but you're going to look your handsomest. And then we'll go out and we'll really turn this town over, but we'll turn it over, pal. We'll burn that two hundred bucks, but all of it, and not in one place."

He called for her at ten o'clock. He was now deeply tanned and the gleaming white dinner jacket provided handsome contrast. The grey eyes seemed greyer. The thick blond crew-cut hair, burnished by sun and freshly brushed, seemed thicker, blonder, and very youthful. He smelled of health and masculine perfume.

She was ravishing in her silver strapless Parisian evening gown (no underwear) and her high-heeled silver pumps (no stockings). In ten days the scars of Pedro Orgaz's fingernails had disappeared as had the scars (if any) of her affair with Pedro Orgaz. The beauty parlor had added additional tints to the gold-blonde hair and had swung it up into an intricate hair-do that revealed the tiny, close-set, inviting ears. Blue eyes were wide and clear and white teeth flashed in the sensuous sheen of smiling, full-curved, magenta-glistening lips.

It was a night to remember. They drank and drank again in all the clubs, big and little, and ate and drank again, and listened to music and watched entertainment and danced, and she was terribly beautiful, and all the men looked upon her.

And then as they sat at table at the Strain Of Melody and listened to the music and sipped their highballs and looked out through the blue haze upon the dancers, he saw his old friend Ken Burns and he waved and Ken Burns waved in return and Evangeline Ashley waved.

"Do you know Kenny?" said Oscar Blinney.

"Who's Kenny?"

"The fellow who's waving."

"I'm not waving at him. I'm waving at Miss Moore."

"Who is Miss Moore?"

"The gal who's dancing with the fellow who's waving."

"Oh," said Blinney and through the churning blur of alcohol it all sounded very reasonable.

Ken Burns worked at the bank

with him. Ken Burns had taken his vacation at the same time he had. Ken Burns had gone to visit relatives at Coral Gables. And now Ken Burns was at the Strain Of Melody dancing with a beautiful willowy brunette and Ken was waving and he was waving back and Evangeline was waving at the girl with Ken and it all seemed normal and reasonable. And then Ken and the girl came to them at the table and sat down.

"Hello, Miss Moore," Evangeline said.

"How are you, Miss Ashley?" said Miss Moore in a cool voice.

"Small world," said Ken Burns. "You two know each other?"

"We went to school together," said Miss Moore.

"Not quite," said Evangeline. "You were a senior when I was a freshman."

"Well, naturally," said Miss Moore, undisturbed. "I'm three years older than you."

Everybody laughed and Ken Burns said, "Adrienne Moore. Oscar Blinney."

"About time," said Miss Moore.

"You girls don't give a guy a chance," said Ken Burns.

"How do you do?" said Miss Moore.

"How do you do?" said Blinney and even through the spinning jollity of the alcohol he realized that she was a most attractive lady, poised and dark and serious, with black shining tumbled short-cut hair, and wondrously deep, luminous black eyes.

"Do you live in Coral Gables?" said Blinney to Miss Moore.

"No. I live and work in New York now. I just came down to visit my parents. I'll be going back some time in April."

"Miss Moore is a painter," said Ken Burns.

"Are you *that* Adrienne Moore?" said Blinney.

"Who's *that* Adrienne Moore?" said Evangeline.

"She's quite famous," confidentially whispered Ken Burns.

"I've seen your pictures in the Hammer Galleries. Just wonderful. I'd imagined you much older," said Blinney.

"Well, thank you."

"So you'd like to do him," said Evangeline.

"Yes. Very much. Marvelous face."

"Maybe you ought to see the rest of him."

"Would I need your permission?"

"Now, girls, girls," said Ken Burns.

"Really? I mean, you would like to paint *me?*" said Blinney.

"The face," said Miss Moore. "It appears that Miss Ashley has a vociferous vested interest in the remainder."

"And it looks like you're trying to do a little trespassing on my vested interests, baby-doll," said Miss Ashley.

"Ha, ha," said Ken Burns, nervously. He was tall, fat, and balding, and his voice was high-pitched.

"What would you call it?" said Blinney.

"I beg your pardon?" said Miss Moore.

"The face" said Blinney. "You know. Paintings have names, don't they?"

"Not portraits," she said, and then she smiled. *"Passion and Passivity,"* she said.

"Oh no!" Evangeline rose. "That ties it! Come on, Passion and Passivity! Waiter, the check! Bye, all! It was nothing!"

"Ha, ha," said Ken Burns.

VII

IT WAS LATE WHEN they left the night club. The streets were hot, deserted. They walked in silence. Then she said, "That bambino was really on the make."

"Nonsense," said Blinney. "I was kidding, and she kidded right back."

"Maybe *you* were kidding, but that chick was on the make."

He looked at her. "Don't tell me you're . . . you're . . ."

"Well, say it, goof."

"Jealous. I mean . . ."

"I am."

"Well, that's the first real nice darn thing—"

"Haven't you ever said damn?" said Evangeline.

"Perhaps. I don't really—"

"You're cute. You know? Cute. Really. Damned cute."

"Look, Evangeline, I want to say, about us . . ."

And then *he* was there before them. On a dim unpeopled street, in the hot night, suddenly he loomed before them. He was very tall, with wide high shoulders, a square swarthy face, and bushy hair.

"Miss Ashley," he said. His voice was coarse, deep, a growl.

"What?" she said. "What is it? What do you want?"

"Do you know him?" said Blinney.

"No," she said.

"Get away," said Blinney.

"Butt out, snotnose," said the swarthy man.

Blinney pushed at the man's shoulder. "Get away, please."

"Oh oh, a wise guy" said the swarthy man. "You'll catch a piece soon. After I finish with Miss Ashley. You I'll come to. Nobody puts a hand on Ronald. Ronald is allergic to hands."

"Who's Ronald?" said Evangeline.

"I'm Ronald" said the swarthy man.

"Do you know him?" said Blinney.

"No. No." She shook her head emphatically.

Blinney pushed at Ronald's chest. "Now please let us alone," he said.

"That's twice, snotnose. Hang

around. Don't go away. First, Miss Ashley."

"What is it?" she said sharply.

"I got a message for you."

"From whom?"

"From someone who knew Senor. He's got a finger in the pie, and he has to safeguard his interests." Ronald's voice hardened. "Now this is the message. The message is that you are an embarrassment. This friend of Senor's don't have nothing against you personal, but he don't want you around to stir up trouble. Senor left behind a very nice setup. This friend says you get out of the state by April First, you know, like April Fool's Day. That's the message. You get out, and everything's nice, and the whole thing's a closed up deal.

"You don't get out, and you're asking for trouble. This friend of Senor's is a kind man. He don't want you should have trouble. Who needs trouble? He knows what really happened. And is also a friend of Little Dee. So get out, go someplace, period, by April One. He's giving you a little time like to pack up. So be a nice little broad and scram."

"Now see here," said Blinney.

"You I'm coming to," said Ronald.

"Do you know what he's talking about?" said Blinney.

"Not at all," said Evangeline.

"Like hell she don't," said Ronald.

"He must be mistaking me for someone else," said Evangeline.

"If that's the way you want it, sweetie"—Ronald looked knowingly at Blinney—"so that's the way it is. I'm mistaking you for some one else."

"And even if I were the person, is this the best place you could pick to talk to me?"

"Sweetie, I been tailing you around all over town. I wanted to talk to you alone. Figured this was the best place to talk, even though you got snotnose with you."

"Have you talked?" said Blinney.

"I have talked," said Ronald.

"Then get away, if you please. Go away."

"Not yet, shmuck. Now I come to you. With the chick I got orders to be nice. But I got no orders to be nice with a shmuck with a big mouth and easy with the hands. It is a pleasure I did not expect. Okay, snotnose, now I come to you."

And he swung, without further warning, a vicious, massive fist to Blinney's mouth. It did not land. Blinney moved his head, just enough. The blow grazed by and Blinney returned a perfect one-two. The jolt of a left jab caught Ronald beneath the heart and as he gasped and straightened, chin exposed, Blinney's right first, with shoulder and back behind it, thundered at the point of the jaw.

Ronald stiffened to his toes,

hung, spun around in one rigid mass, and fell like a plank, his forehead striking the sidewalk. He lay still.

"Oh my," breathed Evangeline, eyes big, transfixed, fingers at her lips. "My God, I never saw anything like that, not even in a prize ring. My God, that was beautiful."

Blinney was trembling. He stooped to Ronald.

"No," said Evangeline, pulling at his arm.

"He's hurt," said Blinney.

"That was the general idea, wasn't it. He tried to hurt you—so you hurt him. Come on. Let's get away from here."

"But I mean—"

"Look. He hit and you hit back. He's some kind of a gangster or something and he certainly deserves whatever happened to him. Now let's get out of here. What's the sense in getting into trouble over this? I've had enough trouble, haven't I?"

Her final words convinced him. She led him away and he went. They turned a corner.

"Wow, but that was beautiful," she said. "Exquisite. I never saw anything like it. You're really something, aren't you?"

"Do you have any idea who he is?"

"None."

"Who's Little Dee?"

"I haven't the faintest."

"But what the devil was he talking about?"

"I wish I knew. But I don't. It must be one of those mistaken identity things."

"Look," Blinney said. "He mentioned Senor—Pedro Orgaz. I couldn't hear all he said, but I caught the name. It might be trouble for you."

"Nonsense. They'll find out their mistake soon enough."

"But—"

"Please forget the whole thing. I want you to."

Blinney shrugged. He waved down a passing cab, and they tooled toward home. Evangeline held his arm, and she said, "It's all over. Why are you trembling again?"

"That man," he said.

"What man?" she said.

"That Ronald. I never hit anybody like that."

"Now, Ozzie, don't kid a kidder. I've seen guys flattened in my time, but nobody ever got flattened more expertly than friend Ronald. You've hit before."

"I was a fighter."

"You? A fighter? A prize-fighter? Oh no. Now we're on the other side. Now we're *way* out. I don't believe it."

"Amateur."

"Oh."

"Boxer."

"Oh."

"Intercollegiate champ."

She squeezed his arm. "Man, you're a character. In your own way, you're a character. There's a

lot I don't know about you. You're just not a talker. Do you like me, Oz?"

"I . . . I love you."

"Hotel Cascade," said the cab-driver.

And upstairs, outside of 203, he said quickly, "Good night."

"Good night," she said.

And in 202 he paced and paced and rubbed his hands together and wondered whether the trembling has all been because of the guilt of the violence. He tried to justify. Even for one as himself, there must be a time, a moment, when violence is justified. But then, instantly, his reason protested. Even if he granted to himself that there could be a moment when violence is justified—had that been such a moment?

He knew that he could have ducked and weaved and dodged and jabbed and made an exhausted spectacle of that blundering muscle-bound would-be strong man. Was it that he had wanted to impress her?

He removed his dinner jacket and cast it upon a chair. And so in patent-leather shoes, dress-pants, cummerbund, collar open, tie loose, he bent to a suitcase, flapped up the cover, and brought out a sealed bottle of Scotch. He opened it, poured into a glass, and gulped whiskey burning, and when the knock came at the door, he went to it and opened it without asking who was there, and there was no one there, and he stood, hand on knob, querulous and squinting blankly.

And the knock came again. And he shut the door of 202 and went quickly to the door between 202 and 203 and there he stood, as though in fear, trembling again. And the knock came again, softly. And he twisted the lock and turned the knob and opened the door, and she was there, and he crossed over.

VIII

BLINNEY HAD EXPERIENCED love-making in his life but he had never experienced love-making as performed by Evangeline Ashley giving expression to her one incontestable talent. He suffered no pang of conscience; at the begin-

ning there is no distinction between infatuation and love; and now, at the beginning, Oscar Blinney was proudly, fiercely, blindly, and overwhelmingly in love.

The door between 202 and 203 was open every night; closed and locked temporarily each morning for the practical reason of propriety involving chambermaids. Blinney expanded with love, and, under the proddings of an already-bored vis-a-vis, he even talked about himself, reluctantly, but then with gradual growing confidence.

And, for the first time since he met her, he told her about his boyhood, his mother, his father, and the six-room house he had inherited in an old quiet section of Mount Vernon. He told her about his nest-egg of $17,000, a portion of which was savings but most of which, like the house, was part of his inheritance. He told her about the First National Mercantile Bank situated at 34th Street and 6th Avenue, and about his job as teller.

He told her about Alfred Hodges, now seventy-three years of age, but spry and spirited and capable, president of the bank since he was thirty-four. He told her of the liberal salary standards instituted by Alfred Hodges all of which pertained right up to the present. He told her, as an instance, of the teller's job. The starting salary was one hundred dollars a week with yearly increases of ten dollars per week until the individual attained a weekly salary of two hundred dollars.

He was now in his seventh year in his teller's job; his salary was one hundred and sixty dollars a week. And he told her about Robert Allan McKnish's job as Credit Manager; a job he hoped to get some day, that the job started at two hundred dollars a week with yearly increases of twenty-five dollars a week until a maximum of three hundred and fifty dollars a week was attained.

And she asked, "Does this sort of thing apply in all banks?"

"No," he said. "Ours is quite special. Mr. Hodges, in his way, is an executive genius. He made these rules, and the Board approved, and he's stayed with them."

"What Board?"

"The Board of Directors."

"Oh, Board of Directors."

"Are you interested?"

"Sure. Of course. Are you kidding? Go on."

"Well, whoever comes to work at First National Mercantile knows just what he's doing and just where he's going. We have eighty-two employees and it's a real happy family. And there are long waiting lists of job-applicants. The bank has a wonderful reputation, and so has its personnel. Of course, Mr. Hodges has set very high basic qualifications for each employee—higher standards than in other

banks—and the more important the job, the tougher the qualifications for the applicant. But it isn't all sweetness and light either. Dear Mr. Hodges insists on certain intramural activities that other banks don't."

"Like what?"

He told her, as an instance, about the Gun Club. In every bank, certain employees have the use of pistols. They obtain licenses from the Police Department for such use, they are instructed in the mechanics of pistol operation, and that is that. Not so at First National Mercantile. If a teller or a cashier or a vice-president has a gun in his drawer, he must, at the insistence of Mr. Hodges, become proficient in its use. Each one who has a license must be a member of the New York Gun Club, must attend target practice every Thursday evening, and must compete in the pistol shoot every fourth Thursday.

"Did you ever win?" she said.

"I always win," he said.

"You?"

He chuckled. "I admit I'm not the type. I'm scared to death of a gun. Perhaps that's why I'm so good. I respect the darned thing" —chuckle again—"with a deadly respect."

"And what else does your Mr. Hodges insist on?"

"That we go to school, night courses; that is, those of us who want to improve ourselves, who want to move up to higher positions in the bank. And he actually checks the courses, talks with the various instructors, finds out how each of us is doing."

"Do you go to night school?"

"Yes. Every Monday and Wednesday. Post graduate stuff."

"Why, are you ambitious?"

"In a way. I have no big dreams. I don't want to rise very high. Credit Manager, and there I'll stay. I believe Old Man McKnish is going to retire this year, and I sure have been aiming for that job, right since I went to work there."

"Any chance, do you think?"

"Yes, I do. Mr. Hodges knows of my dream and desire; and he knows me since I was a little boy. The Board does the appointing, but Mr. Hodges has influence, of course. I have the background and the education, I've never been in trouble, I've never been in any scandal, I'm practically the head-teller right now, and I am in charge of the most important payrolls."

"Payrolls?" she said. "Don't most firms pay by check?"

"A great many do. A great many don't. There are matters of policy. Anyway, Thursdays and Fridays are my payroll days; when I prepare payrolls."

"*Two* days?"

"Fridays there are a lot of little ones. Thursdays, there are five big ones: Martin Aircraft, Hughes Construction, Fairfax Electronics,

North American Builders, and Marshall Contractors Corp. They all have plants throughout the Metropolitan area, and on Long Island. They have part-time workers, and over-time, aside from regular employees. It gets quite complicated. They call in their payrolls on Thursday mornings. By then, they have an approximation. They make up the rest from their own office safes.

"It mounts up. By one o'clock in the afternoon, I've probably packaged up to three hundred thousand dollars, mostly in hundreds and fifties, and then down to twenties, tens, fives, and ones. They pick up at about one or two in the afternoon, each, of course, separately. Their own cashiers distribute the money into pay-envelopes and their own guards do the distributing to the various plants on Friday."

"Pretty important," she said, "aren't you?"

"Not really. Accurate, or let's call it dependable. I'm glad I have the job because it shows that they depend on me, and that I'm in excellent standing, and that I'm in fairly good shape in my bid for the job I want. Of course, Mr. Hodges says—perhaps he's kidding—that for the Board of Directors I may be lacking in just one thing."

"And that?" she said.

"A wife," he said.

"That all?" she said.

"According to Mr. Hodges, it would add to my stature, stability, something. In the opinion of the Board of directors."

"And being a bachelor? That would be fatal?"

"I hope not," he said, and flushed, and changed the subject and told her about the banquet each year on the fifteenth of December at the Grand Ballroom of The Commodore when the speeches were made and the bonuses declared and another thousand dollars added to the First National Mercantile Heroism Award.

"Heroism Award?" she said. "What's that?"

"It's been accumulating for twenty-one years."

"I still don't understand."

"Last time it was paid was twenty-two years ago to an employee named Edwin Samuelson."

"But what is it?"

"An award of a thousand dollars if one of the employees of the bank performs an act of heroism. If no one does during that year, another thousand dollars is added the next year, and so on and so on. Right now it stands at twenty-one thousand dollars."

"No one has been a hero in twenty-one years?"

He smiled, kissed her forehead. "That's not as strange as it sounds. Very few people, during a lifetime, perform an act of heroism, that is, ordinary people, in ordinary walks of life. There must be both the opportunity, which happens very

rarely, and the inclination to act on such opportunity. Actually, an act of heroism is a rare occurrence. We have eighty-two people employed in the bank; nice, ordinary people. In twenty-one years, nobody was a hero. In the bank, there's never been a holdup, or, really any kind of untoward happening. In our private lives, we just go along, humdrum and normal."

"How would you like to win a Heroism Award?"

"Me?"

"The Evangeline Ashley Heroism Award."

"Love it. How?"

"Put your arms around me and kiss me. But like a hero."

And on the twenty-third day of March he asked her to marry him. He even made a joke. "For me, for Mr. Hodges, for the Board of Directors," he said. "But especially for me."

The moment was propitious. She was at low ebb. She was unsettled, at loose ends, disappointed, and fearful. Her brief career as an actress had been preposterous even to her. Her return to Florida had been a descent, step by step, from glorified waitress in the Upstairs Room, to the tumultuous affair with Bill Grant, to the sickening and simultaneous affair with Orgaz, to the tiresome job as hostess in a tea room.

Bill Grant was gone. Orgaz was dead, by her hand. She had no job, no plans, no prospects. And she gave grave heed to the warning she had received, a warning which it would be dangerous to ignore. She was, in fact, grateful for the warning, for she knew, from Bill Grant, that Pedro's associates were not men who had need to give warnings. If she were an embarrassment to one of them he could have squashed her somewhere in the dark and ended any embarrassment. Instead it had been his whim to send an underling with a warning. She had no intention of staying in Florida beyond the prescribed period.

She remembered that hungover morning with the elderly director just prior to her exodus from Hollywood. She remembered his words. *Go home and catch up with a nice young guy your own age and get married and have babies and live happily ever after. What have you to lose?*

And so she accepted the proposal of Oscar Blinney.

IX

THEY WERE MARRIED on the morning of the twenty-sixth day of March. During the forenoon of the twenty-sixth day of March, her worldly goods—her Savings Bank account—under arrangements made by Banker Blinney, were transferred in her name to the Mount Vernon Savings Bank in the State of New York from the

Miami Savings Bank in the State of Florida.

Then they packed. At two o'clock of the afternoon of the twenty-sixth day of March they flew north for a short honeymoon in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They checked into the Mayfair Hotel at eight o'clock in the evening of the twenty-sixth day of March. At ten o'clock of the evening of the twenty-seventh day of March, during their short honeymoon in Atlantic City, New Jersey, she was, for the first time, unfaithful to him.

He was sick during that day, the twenty-seventh. Stomach virus, the doctor had said, not unusual when coming from the South to the North. It would pass in a day or two, the doctor said.

She went down to the bar, bought herself a drink, and then was bought a drink by the dark curly-haired man. The dark curly-haired man had a deep voice and an elegant manner. He was a salesman for Rona Plastics which was having their convention tomorrow, but he had arrived a day early. He bought more drinks for her and for himself, told her about his lovely twins aged three, told her about his lovely wife whom he loved dearly, and took her to his room.

She returned to her own room at midnight, cognizant of the fact that she had never learned the name of the salesman from Rona

Plastics. She wished his twins well, and his wife, looked down upon Blinney who was snoring peacefully, drank bourbon from the open bottle, undressed, and went to bed.

Blinney recovered nicely.

On the thirtieth day of March he took her home to Mount Vernon. Blinney was sentimental. He asked if he could carry her across the threshhold. She approved. She said she would not go in any other way. He carried her across the threshhold.

Within a month Blinney knew that it would not work. Within a month he knew of his egregious mistake. Within a month he knew that he had set, baited, and

snapped a trap upon himself (as which of us has not done sometime during a lifetime)? She was slovenly. She was incapable of caring for a home. She had no interest. She drank at all hours of the day. She lay around in flimsy negligee flipping the pages of picture magazines. She did not prepare meals. She could not cook. They ate in restaurants, or, if they ate at home, Blinney would do the cooking as he had done when he was a bachelor.

There were always dishes in the sink, and the house was dirty. Before he was married, Blinney had had a woman who came in to clean four times a week. After he was married, Blinney discharged her. He was ashamed. His wife drank all day. She was capable of filthy language. She could be uproariously drunk in the afternoon. He could not have a stranger in the house. He was ashamed, and he was fearful of the possibility of gossip in the small town.

She was bored, indifferent, and lazy. She depended solely, as she had always done, upon the snare of her sexual attractiveness. Blinney still required her but panic and revulsion had returned. She neglected the house but she took meticulous care of her body. She lay in scented baths. She preened, creamed, and pomaded. Her chief interests were shopping, the beauty parlor, jazz records which she played interminably, bars and taverns in the afternoon, and nightclubs at night.

The pattern settled into mold, congealed, crystallized, fixed. They were as strangers (or as lovers living in hate). Occasionally they went out together; ate, drank, laughed, and even flirted. He detested her and detested himself when he succumbed to her and learned of the satanic thrill of spasmodic flesh-lust practiced in revulsion, despair, and self-hatred.

Thursdays and Fridays are the busiest days in all banks and The First National Mercantile, at 34th Street and 6th Avenue, was no exception. On Thursdays and Fridays Blinney was about as busy as any man who worked at First National Mercantile.

He had developed time-saving procedures. Each Monday he took home the payroll sheets of the week before, studied them, and had an approximate idea of the amounts which would be required. On Thursday at 9:05 he would call down to the vault for the approximate amount of cash in the approximate denominations customarily requisitioned by his five big Thursday accounts.

By nine-thirty, they would call in the actual amounts needed. Within his cage and behind the shatter-proof window (which he could unlock and raise and lower), he would package the payrolls during the quiet of the early morning and during breaks in the more

busy hours when there was usually a long line of customers in front of his window. By twelve-thirty his payroll work was completed and the money lay in his drawer within binder-strips marked $1000, $2000, and $5000.

The business of banking at his level was unadventurous and routine; he was a glorified clerk; a sales person behind a counter dealing in currency. Between one and two o'clock in the afternoon the men would come for their parcels of money; usually men in pairs, big and burly ex-policemen, smiling, and making their jokes. They would wait in line until their turn, slip their requisitions through the slot beneath the window, make their first joke, and wait.

He would raise the window, accept their briefcase, neatly stack the packages of money within its recess, listen to another joke, return the briefcase, lower his window, and see them again the next week, hopeful for a better joke. He was not impressed with himself, his business, or the high adventure it entailed.

And so, on the fifth day of May, at one o'clock, when the phone beside him tinkled, he lifted the receiver without enthusiasm. Flatly he said, "Hello?"

The female voice said, "Mr. Blinney?"

"This is he," he said.

"Adrienne Moore."

"Who?" he said.

"Adrienne Moore. This *is* Mr. Blinney?"

His voice took on timbre. "Oh yes. Of course! Gee, Miss Moore. So good of you to call." But the line of customers stretched in front of him, impatiently buzzing.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," she said.

"As a matter of fact, you are," he said. "May I call you back later?"

"Yes, of course. Sorry to have been of trouble."

"No trouble. No trouble at all."

"I'm in the phone book, Mr. Blinney. The address is Washington Mews. I'll be in all day."

"I'll call you back. Thank you for calling."

"Oh, not at all. Good-bye, Mr. Blinney."

"Good-bye, Miss Moore."

And as he cashed a check for a beaming rotund lunch-hour lady-customer, hope thrilled within him; there welled within him, unaccountably, an intuitive presentiment of succor.

He called her, from a phone booth, at five-thirty. By then, he had made up his mind to skip, for the first time, target practice at the Gun Club. He had not talked with another woman, alone, since the advent of Evangeline Ashley. He had not talked with another woman, alone, since the trap had closed upon him, since despair had become a part of him, since his life, in so short a time, had nar-

rowed to a sense-dulled despondent mechanical existence, somehow incomprehensible.

He remembered her, vividly. He remembered Adrienne Moore. He remembered the soft, feminine, sympathetic beauty, despite the drunkenness of that night, and despite the then overwhelming presence of Evangeline Ashley. He remembered the soft outlines of her face. He remembered her sweet smile. He remembered the muted, melodious, deep-toned, cultured voice.

And he remembered the respect she had engendered within him. Respect. Respect was a part of love. Respect had always been a part of his dream of love. Respect! How mad can you get? Respect!—his dream of respect—the woman on the pedestal—and he had married Evangeline Ashley!

He called, from a phone booth, at five-thirty. He asked Miss Moore to dinner and she accepted. He said he would call for her at seven o'clock. She said that would be perfectly lovely and he thanked her and he hung up. Promptly at seven o'clock he presented himself at her house in Washington Mews near Greenwich Village, but they did not go out for dinner.

She answered his ring, opened the door, and invited him in. She wore black pumps, black tapered slacks, and a black sleeveless sweater. She was tall and slender and well-figured and haughty of carriage, darkly smooth-skinned, high-colored in visage, high-hipped, round-armed, delicate-fingered, red-lipped, and tousle-haired.

"Hi," she said in her serious deep voice. "So good to see you."

"Hello, Miss Moore," he said.

"Come in. Please do come in."

He entered into a large living room which contained one of the rarities of homes in New York: a wood-burning fireplace—which was burning wood. It was a beautiful room, the walls entirely of a warm thin-stripped wood, the ceiling of a lighter wood with inlaid designs. She took his hat and said, "Would you like a Martini, Mr. Blinney?"

"Yes, thank you."

She poured gin and vermouth and strirred with a long cocktail spoon. "You're probably wondering about my motives," she said. "I still want to do you, and I'd like to start tonight, so, by your leave, I took the liberty of preparing a bit of dinner which we'll eat in. Was I too bold?"

"No, no, not at all."

She smiled. "You wouldn't think me an aggressive sort, now would you, Mr. Blinney?"

"I wouldn't know," he said. "And please, not Mr. Blinney."

"Well, I am, Oscar. And according to Kenny, you are of a—well, let us say—of a mild temperament." She smiled again. "There's nothing mild about me, Oscar. Per-

haps then, with opposite natures, we'll be good for one another; sort of complement one another."

"Perhaps," he said and sipped his Martini.

"Are you too polite to ask the question?"

"Question?" he said.

"If I'm supposed to be that interested in you—how come I took until now to be in touch with you?"

The drink had begun to melt some of his shyness. "I admit I thought of it, I mean, just now, for a moment."

"I have a very good excuse. I wasn't here. I just got into town. Today."

"You remained in Coral Gables?"

"No. I had a show. At the Berkshire Galleries in San Francisco. I flew there directly from Coral Gables. And so now you must realize that I have not been derelict, that I do pursue, and that I'm shamefully aggressive." And she laughed. And then she cocked her head and studied him. "You know, something's been added."

"Pardon?" he said.

"Your face. There's a new dimension. I believe I'm going to have more fun painting you than I had anticipated." She moved her head back as she regarded him, her eyes narrowing.

"You sit and sip," she said, "while I engage myself in my kitchen. Be with you in a trice, or perhaps thrice trice. Thrice trice, nice." She giggled, as a very young girl. "Thrice trice is not twice trice but thrice trice. Say that quickly a dozen times or so. It'll cut the waiting time."

Appetizer was hot shrimp, main course was roast ribs of beef with mashed potatoes and juice-gravy, tossed green salad, and sparkling Burgundy; dessert was expresso coffee and petit-fours, and more sparkling Burgundy. And then she said, "Oscar, you're exactly as I pictured you would be. This has really been a charming evening and I thank you."

"Oh no. I thank *you*."

"Which brings me to another point."

"Yes?"

"I warned you I was a blunt one."

"Yes, Adrienne?"

"Blunt, yes, but not bitchy, although what I'll say now may sound bitchy. About the girl you were with that night, Evangeline."

"I . . . I . . ."

"If ever there were two people who didn't belong in each other's company!"

"I . . . please . . ." He reached for the goblet of Burgundy and drank rapidly.

"You're obviously such a decent kind of guy. And that one." She shook her head, her face serious and puzzled. "She had a horrible reputation at school, *just*

horrible. And the rumors that drifted back after she left school . . ."

"Please."

"I was no longer in Coral Gables but, gosh, every time I had a visitor from the South, they were full of choice tidbits of Evangeline Ashley in Rome, and Evangeline Ashley in Hollywood. I just can't understand a man like you and a gal like that—and honestly, I'm not being bitchy."

"I . . . I married her."

It was as though she had not heard. "Pardon?"

"I married her."

And now it was as though she did not understand. "Married whom?"

"Evangeline Ashley."

And now it struck and blood suffused her face in a dark flush. "I'm sorry. Oh, I'm dreadfully sorry. I'm so damned ashamed."

"I . . . I regret it."

"So do I. Please forgive me." The flush remained, perspiration at her temples. The deep, dark, enormous eyes quivered with tears. "I . . . I'm just beside myself. Damn!"

"No, no." He gulped, spoke slowly, distinctly. "I regret that I married her."

"Please. If you please. I'd rather not talk about it."

"No. If *you* please. I rather would. I must. Please. Please listen."

And he had release. He had confession. Calmly, unhurriedly, stolidly, in an unemotional monotone, as though a witness reciting the misadventures of another, he told her all he knew of Evangeline Ashley, from the moment that he had first seen her to the present; he told her of his courtship and his marriage; he told her of his trap and its convolutions, the impossible insoluble quandary; he told her of himself, his background, his parents, his job, the bank, Alfred Hodges, even the Board of Directors—all in relation to Evangeline Ashley.

He talked for almost two hours to her nods, grunts, murmurs, and small noises of comprehension, but she did not interrupt once. And then he was finished. He sat back, and they were silent.

And then he said, "I'm sorry."

Almost truculently she said, "For what?"

"For sitting her and running off at the mouth like that. For boring you. For—"

"Now stop that!"

He sighed, bit a corner of his mouth. "Maybe it was the wine. Maybe I just had to talk to someone. Maybe it was . . . was you."

"I hope, sincerely—it was I."

He pushed his knees against the chair and stood up. "I'll be going now. I thank you, for everything . . . and for listening."

"Going where, Oscar?"

He shrugged.

"Home?" she said.

"No." He spoke the word dully.

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"Why?"

He shrugged again. "Because I think I've taken advantage of you. Because it's late. Because you've been very nice, and I'm most appreciative. Because I like you . . . very much . . . too much."

"That's no reason for wanting to go away, is it?" And she stood up, and her smile was small, and tender.

"It is," he said. "Things . . . happen to me. Thoughts. An excitement with certain people. You. It's wrong." He grimaced, ran a hand down his cheek. "There must be something wrong with me. Rotten. I must be rotten somewhere."

"Not at all," she said. "Sensitive, perhaps yes. The kind of thoughts that run through your mind run through the minds of all men, and they delight in them, they feel a masculine delight with themselves, they don't feel they're rotten, and they feel no guilt about it." The small smile widened. "Kindly understand. This is explanation. Not encouragement."

"But what I'm trying to say—"

"I know just what the heck you're trying to say. I'm a woman, I'm an attractive woman, and if I wouldn't—how shall I say?—stir the beast in a man, I'd be awfully disappointed, in myself, and the man. But we don't live in a jungle, and I'm not—forgive me—an Evangeline Ashley. I have scruples, and principles, and morals, and all the rest of that bosh, except it isn't bosh. Now, if you please, you don't go home on Thursdays, do you?"

"No."

"You may stay over here, if you wish."

"But you—"

"Oscar, you're a dear innocent, and like all dear innocents, more direct, more deadly, and more dangerous than the supposed sophisticates. Staying over here, sleeping here, does not mean sleeping with me. Kindly, dear innocent, get that straight. I have plans for you, and for the nonce, and probably for a long time to come, they are non-sexual. I like you very much. In my own way, as I had suspected I would, I may be falling in love with you, already.

"But, I repeat, I'm not—well, let's not mention names. Let's say I'm not of that ilk, not at all. Now, tonight, I'd like to do my first sketch of you. Tonight, your face, to me, the painter, is just wonderful, I love it. So, if you're willing . . ."

"Yes," he said. "I'd like to stay."

"And you'll sit for me?"

"Of course."

"Now?"

"Yes," he said.

"It's tiring, especially at the beginning. But I'll babble. I won't talk about you, or any of your problems. I'll talk about me."

"I'm ready," he said.

"Come with me, dearest innocent."

X

THEY SAW ONE another every day. They ate together, either in Washington Mews, or in restaurants that they kept "discovering." They were deeply, quickly, in love. They went to theatre together, concerts, ballet, museums, art exhibits, jazz joints, coffee houses, and opera. They slept, frequently, under one roof, separately.

Oscar Blinney, quiet, reserved, laconic, and outwardly bland, but harried, suffering, miserably happy at odd moments and deeply despondent at others, had had the double experience—for the first time in twenty-nine years—and one within three months of the other—of the ecstasy and nadir-reaction of fulminating infatuation with one woman and the profound, humble, beatific, and expanding emotion of love with another, when, on the seventh day of June, the woman to whom he was married announced that she was pregnant.

He came home, perspiring, at midnight of a warm Friday, and Evangeline was waiting for him, cool and pony-tailed, in orange ballet-tights, orange slippers, and a tight orange sleeveless backless scoop-necked blouse.

"Hi, Dad," she said. "Nice to see you once in a while."

"Likewise," he said.

"Nice to see you, Dad," she said. "And the Dad ain't jazz-type talk, Dad. The Dad is real Dad."

"Oh, now, what the hell this time?" he said wearily.

"Dad, you're going to be a father, Dad. Like I'm a little bit knocked up."

He could not have predicted his reaction. Adrienne had called him an innocent and right then he knew, for all time, that he was. His heart leaped within him and the elixir of total forgiveness was part of his blood. Suddenly Adrienne Moore was an impropriety. Suddenly the salve of love was a blistering ointment. Suddenly the garish woman before him, hatefully attractive, was Mother, was the Mother-Of-All, was Eve, was Mary with Miraculous Child. Suddenly there was hope, transcendence, reformation of the accursed. The new-born, the young, the progeny would purify.

Suddenly there was hope, of child, children, family, purpose, a knitting together, a striving-forward, a balance, a meaning, a plan and design no matter how jaggedly fitted together. Now the edges would smoothen; life stir-

ring in one would perform amelioration upon all. Suddenly perspiration was of emotion rather than climate. He thrust off his jacket, pulled down his tie, opened his shirt.

"Are you sure?" he said.

"Too goddamned sure," she said.

And still the nirvana was upon him. "How do you know?"

"I went to a doctor, that's how I know. I had the whole bit, the rabbit bit, everything. There's a babe, no doubts, no angles, no anything else. Like no tumor, you know?"

"Now look, Eve, maybe this is it. Maybe this is what we needed. Maybe we settle down, you know? Kids, a family, little ones, something to punch for, something to get together about, something to give us focus, a reason, a meaning . . ."

"Rave on, McDuff."

"No, Eve, seriously, this could be it."

"In a pig's eye it could be it."

"No, Eve, listen—"

"Now *you* listen, and listen real close. I'm going to have this thing aborted. Now in Cuba, Havana, they do it like legal, real nice, in a hospital, antiseptic, you know what I mean. I'm going. I'm flying down, fast. I want you to pay. If you don't pay, I use my own loot. You got me into this. Get me out."

"No," he said.

"Yes," she said.

"Eve, listen to me—"

"Sure, listen to you—because it's not you. Well, you listen to me—because it's *me*. I'm not going to carry your brat. It makes me sick, just to think of it. You're so good, you're so considerate—why don't you try to understand that? I don't want—and either you send me, or I go myself. Now which way do you want it, Daddy-boy? Nice, proper, ethical fella—which way do you want it? You send me, or do I send myself?"

And at last, he knew. Finally, completely, sickeningly—he knew. Suddenly he was whole again, forever. "I'll send you," he said.

"Nice Daddy," she said. "Now the sooner I go the better. In a day or two. All right?"

"How much?

"I'll go for a month. Take care of it, rest up, you know. I figure two thousand for the whole deal. Two thousand should do it. Any more, I'll pay out of my own."

EVANGELINE RETURNED ON the second day of July. She had been gone twenty-three days. It was a Saturday at ten o'clock in the morning. Blinney was in pajamas, in the kitchen, frying bacon and eggs. Adrienne Moore was in Chicago, on business, for the weekend. He heard the outside door slam and he called, "Who is it?"

"It's me," she said.

He had never seen her looking better. She was deeply tanned, glowing and her expression was radiant.

"I brought a friend," she said.

Her arm was linked through the arm of her friend. Her friend was tall, dark, slender, erect, and handsome. Her friend was dressed in beautiful fashion: charcoal-grey pin-stripe suit of silk, shiny black shoes, oyster-grey shirt of the finest cambric, conservative tiny gold-figured tie of black foulard.

Her friend had a black curly Vandyke beard, charming, dashing, Bohemian, well-tended and trimmed. Her friend had dark eyes as soft as a woman's, and an amused, bemused, somewhat sardonic expression.

"This is Bill Grant," she said.

"How do you do," said Blinney.

"My husband, Oscar Blinney."

"How do you do," said Bill Grant.

"Bill is an old friend from Miami," said Evangeline.

"Ran into each other in Havana," said Bill Grant. "Americans can't miss in Havana. There are only a certain number of places that Americans frequent. Sooner or later, they meet."

"You going to stay in the States now, Mr. Grant?" said Blinney.

"For a short while. Perhaps six weeks or so. Actually, I'm en route to London."

There was a sizzle from the kitchen. "Bacon burning," said Blinney. "You people hungry?"

"Starved," said Evangeline.

"Bacon and eggs?" said Blinney.

"Fine," said Bill Grant.

After breakfast Evangeline said, "Are you going to need the car, Oz?"

"Not especially. Why?"

"There's a good motel a couple of miles down on the Highway. Silver Crest, I think it's called. I'd like to drive Bill over."

"What about your bags, Mr. Grant?"

"They're outside in your foyer."

"So are mine," said Evangeline. "I wish you'd take them up for me, Oz. All right about the car?"

"Certainly," said Blinney.

"Thank you," said Bill Grant.

"Not at all," said Blinney.

Whether Oscar Blinney was driven by unconscious motive to go home the next Thursday night, he could never say. Whether the conscious rationale of feeling suddenly very tired was a screen for the unconscious motivation, he could never say. He had never gone home on a Thursday night since he was married. He went home on this Thursday night.

He had no conscious desire to sneak, to peek, to pry. He went home because Adrienne had a bad cold and couldn't see him and the Gun Club meeting seemed

an intolerable alternative. He went home in order to wear a clean unstained suit the next day; he went home in order to bathe and sleep in the house where he was born; he did not go home to spy upon Mrs. Evangeline Ashley Blinney.

The house was dark when he arrived. There was no hum from the air-conditioners. The foyer was hot and airless when he put on the light. He threw off his jacket and went directly upstairs to the bedroom. He opened the door to a heavy admixture of many odors: perfume, perspiration, bourbon, stale cigarettes, smell of human breathing.

He switched on the light. They lay in his bed without covers, asleep. Bill Grant was prone, on his stomach, sleeping on one side of his face. She huddled about him, as though protecting him. There was an empty bottle of bourbon on the floor beside the bed. There were glasses on the bed-table. Stubs of cigarettes floated stickily in the brown residue in the glasses. The ashtrays were heaped with butts.

The overhead light did not disturb Bill Grant. He remained prone, on his stomach, sleeping soundlessly, on the side of his face. She moved. She raised herself upon an elbow, turned her head and blinked her eyes, annoyance disfiguring her face. She saw her husband. She closed one

eye, squinting. Then she lifted one hand, waving him off, fingers moving slowly.

"Go away," she said thickly. "Put out that damn light and go away. Will you please?"

"Phew," Blinney said, feeling an infinite disgust.

He went to the air-conditioner and touched a button. The motor commenced its initial roar. He crossed to the light-switch and thumbed off the overhead light. He closed the door and went downstairs. He put on his jacket and left the house. He walked

all the way to the station breathing deeply and contentedly.

He was cured and he knew it. Finally the sickness was vanquished and he was immune to recurrence. He never slept in the same bed with her again. For the remainder of their marriage he slept downstairs in the living room. He never desired her again. The sickness was finished.

The one remaining problem was ridding himself of her. The trap was as firmly sealed as ever but at least it was no longer a trap within a trap; he was loosened from self-hatred; her lure was dissipated; her wiles were feckless; he was free of her within himself.

XI

ON THE SEVENTH day of August, the third Wednesday of that month, Adrienne Moore was packing for a trip to France, a quick trip, but one which she faced with divided emotions. She was to have a two-week showing of some of her paintings in one of the major galleries of Paris and she was to attend a number of dinners where she and her work were to be feted and honored. This was a distinct and important step in an already important career and a step which, her manager insisted, could not and should not be avoided.

In all, the trip comprised nineteen days. Not long, but she was worried about Blinney. She was loath but she was prevailed upon. Now, when Blinney arrived, she had completed her packing. He arrived at five-twenty. He had a post-graduate class in banking for that evening which he had no intention of attending. He was to accompany her to the airport. Her plane was scheduled to take off at seven o'clock.

They had a drink together and they chatted and she studied him with her painter's eye and she wondered suddenly whether she had been wrong to deny herself to him.

At a quarter to six the phone rang and she answered it and she came from it perplexed. "It's for you," she said.

"Me?" he said. "Who would be calling me here?"

"It's a man," she said.

"What man?" he said.

"He didn't give a name. Wants to talk to you."

He went to the telephone, lifted the receiver, said, "Hello?"

"Bill Grant, here," said Bill Grant.

"Who?"

"Take it easy, pal. Easy does it. Keep your voice down and talk like it's casual. I said—this is Bill Grant."

Softly Blinney said, "How did you know to call me here?"

"Oh, man, there are a lot of things I know. Like your chick is

taking a plane for Paris at seven o'clock. Good? Good, huh?"

"What do you want?"

"You'll tell her it's somebody from the bank that called you. A friend like about an excuse for cutting your class tonight. Dig?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you. Personal. You and me. Alone."

"What about?"

"About your—dilemma. That's a beauty for what you've got, pal. A dilemma. And, man, yours is a whopper. I may be able to help, Mr. Blinney. You do know what I'm talking about?"

"What?"

"Evangeline. Dig?"

"Yes."

"Will you meet me tonight?"

"Yes."

"Remember this address. Two thirty-three East thirty-third. It's apartment 1 A. Push the button downstairs. How's nine o'clock?"

"Yes."

"You're a smart man, Mr. Blinney. A pleasure to talk to you. See you at nine. Tell the chick it's a guy from the bank. Bye, now." He hung up.

Blinney hung up and returned smiling fearfully.

"Who was that?" she asked.

"One of the boys from the bank."

"Bank?"

"Fellow who takes class with me. I once told him where he could reach me, not at home, in case of emergency. His idea of a gag." He looked at his watch. "I think we'd better get going."

"Yes," she said . . .

He took her to the plane. He saw her off. He kissed her goodbye. He had a light dinner at the restaurant at the airport. He thought about Evangeline and Bill Grant. He suddenly had hope. Perhaps they were in love. Perhaps they wanted one another. Perhaps this was it. Perhaps this would produce the divorce that he desired so devoutly: quiet, friendly, practical, adult, uncontested and unrecriminatory.

In the taxi, driving back into town, he resolved not to add new guilt to old guilt so newly acquired. He would tell Bill Grant. He would tell what he knew of Evangeline. He would not permit this man to follow the spoor that he had created. He would tell him all, everything he knew about Evangeline, and then, if the man persisted, he, Blinney, would have no remainder of stigma of guilt.

He rolled down the windows as they traversed the bridge. It was hot-August but the hot breeze was cooling. The cab stopped at 33rd Street and Second Avenue.

"It's one-way the other way," the cabbie said. "You want to get out here, mister? Save you two-bits."

"Sure," said Blinney.

He paid and alighted. He

walked to 233 East 33rd Street. It was an old brownstone with a new yellow-brick front. It had a seven-stepped stoop that led into a small, dim, hot, dank-smelling lobby. The name GRANT was printed in ink on a strip of cardboard in a narrow bracket above one of the bells.

Blinney pushed the bell, the buzz of a clicker, responded, and Blinney pressed his palm against a glass-panelled door which opened upon a steep wooden stairway. He climbed the stairs and knocked upon the door of 1 A. "Come right in," called the voice of Bill Grant.

Blinney opened the door and closed it behind him. Bill Grant was seated in a frayed easy chair. Bill Grant was smiling welcome but the gun in his hand negated the smile. It was a large gun. Blinney recognized the type. It was a Luger. The Luger was pointed at him.

"So good to see you," said Bill Grant.

"Please don't point that gun at me," said Oscar Blinney.

"Mostly," said Bill Grant, "it's for effect."

"It has made its effect."

"The purpose was to startle you."

"I am startled," said Blinney.

"That was the primary purpose. There are secondary purposes."

"So?" said Blinney.

"You know, you're a cool one," said Bill Grant. "I like that. That's all to the good. It'll work out to our mutual benefit."

"Let's get to the secondary purposes—if that will stop you from pointing the gun at me."

"Secondary purposes are sundry," said Bill Grant, "as follows. extraordinary circumstance. Reaction—excellent. I commend you." He touched his free hand to his beard. "Second, to acquaint you with the fact that I own a gun. Third, to acquaint you with the fact that I know how to handle a gun. Fourth—and on this you must take my word—to inform you that if I shot you dead right now, it would not mean one goddamned thing to me. I have done it before, shot people dead. Clear, Mr. Blinney?"

"Clear," said Blinney. "Would you now stop pointing the gun at me? Or better still, put it away."

"Are you afraid of guns, Mr. Blinney?"

"Mortally," said Blinney.

"Capital," said Bill Grant, grinning approval. "You know, I like you, Mr. Blinney. I wasn't certain whether I would. But I do. It makes matters so much more pleasant, dealing with people you like. You know?"

"I'm still uncomfortable, Mr. Grant." Blinney pointed. "The gun."

"But you're quite a marksman yourself, aren't you, sir?"

"How do you know?"

"I know, I know." Grant's head moved up and down. "I know so much about you, Mr. Blinney, I'm fairly leaking information. I've devoted the last six weeks of my life to you, Mr. Blinney. To you, almost exclusively."

Grant lowered the gun, and his shoulders moved as he chuckled. "All right. Sit down. Over there." He pointed to an easy chair facing his. "Sit, and let's stop making with the charming palaver. We have serious talking to do, you and I."

Blinney sat in the chair indicated.

Grant rose and placed the gun on a mantel behind his chair, returned to the chair, sat, slumped, crossed his legs and clasped his hands. "Where do you want me to begin, Mr. Blinney?" he said.

"Since I have no idea why I'm here, or what you want to begin—begin wherever you like, Mr. Grant."

"Now you're getting annoying, Mr. Blinney." Grant unclasped his hands and straightened in the chair. "Don't annoy me. I don't like it."

"What do you want of me, Mr. Grant? You called me. And how did you know to call me there?"

"Now come off it, pal. I told you I've practically been living on your tail these past six weeks. I know so much about you, it makes me sick. I know about your Mama and your Papa and why you were called Oscar and your fight-career and the bank and Alfred Hodges and Mr. McKnish and the Board of Directors and the fancy chick you're living with. I know so much about you, Mr. Blinney, I'm regurgitating with it."

"Why?" said Blinney.

Grant wrinkled his nose and his voice touched falsetto. "Because I'm going to help you, that's why, Mr. Blinney."

"Look," said Blinney. "Are you in love with Evangeline? Is that what all this back-scratching is about? Because, if you are, first I want to tell you—"

"In love with that two-timing little tramp!" Grant's eyes went round and he raised a hand and pushed it against the air as though holding something back. "Are you out of your mind? Look here, Mr. Blinney, you married that bum, not me. You married her, remember? And she's trouble, big trouble, especially for a guy like you. And I'm here to get you out of your trouble."

"How?" said Oscar Blinney. He rested his elbows upon the arms of the frayed easy chair and he touched the fingers of one hand to the fingers of the other.

"May I start at the beginning now?" said Bill Grant.

"Please do," said Oscar Blinney.

"No. I'll be kind. I won't tell

you *all* about Evangeline. Only as applies to us, you and me. First off, even crud like that had somewhere, hidden within it, emotion. And I"—he lowered his head in a form of bow—"am the fortunate recipient of the flow of her emotion. You, for instance, are the jerk of jerks to her. Me? I'm God. Sort of gives me a bit of power, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes," said Blinney.

"We were friends in Miami. She knew I'd gone to Havana. And when she got sick and tired and bored to death of you, she came to Havana seeking me. She did not need an abortion, Mr. Blinney."

"Oh, no. No . . ."

"Oh, yes. Yes. She did not need an abortion. She knew you for the jerk you are and she knew how to work her points. She held you up for that two thousand, like expense money, to pay her way while she tried to find me. She found me. She knew I had no interest in her but she knew I had an interest in a big score. A big score. Do you know what that means, Mr. Blinney?"

"Yes. I think . . ."

"She knew my interest in a big score would freshen up my interest in her. She told me all about you. Everything. All about you. Naturally, she's a crumb. She threw the pitch but she threw the wrong one. You know what her idea was, Mr. Blinney?"

"No," he said.

"To let you out. To ease you out. I was to convince you that a proper divorce, at any price, was cheap—which, of course, in your case, it is. You'd pay, right through the nose. You had seventeen big ones in the bank. You gave two to her. That left fifteen. Your house in Mount Vernon is now worth thirty thousand dollars. In case you don't know that, I'm telling you. Your wife made discreet inquiries. Thirty and fifteen is forty-five.

"A guy like you figures to be able to borrow like fifteen. Total, sixty large ones. That was her proposition. That I come up to the States, and use my . . . er . . . persuasion to convince you. For a guy like you, it would be worth it. Aside from the job-business, you're not a guy who can mix in filth. You weren't brought up that way; it's not in you. Free and clear and no complications, I could convince you."

"And that's why you came up here?"

"No."

"But didn't you say—"

"Mr. Blinney, you married into another world. We're people who don't even speak your language. I'm trying hard to get through so that you can understand. Understand?"

"No."

"I've worked it out for you, Mr. Blinney. I'm your deliverer. I've

planted a double-frame, it's so perfect, it tickles me. You're protected, I'm protected—and even your banker's mind won't be able to figure out a flaw. And you're out—clean, clear, once and for all—and it costs you nothing, you hang on to your sixty gee.

"There's only one way, Mr. Blinney. Way down deep in your heart, you know it. What you've been pushing away, what you don't dare let yourself think about. There's only one way, Mr. Blinney, and you damned well know it."

Faintly: "What way?"

"We kill her, Mr. Blinney," said Grant.

"No!" Blinney half-rose from the chair.

"Sit down."

Blinney sat.

"We're going to kill her, Mr. Blinney. It's so perfect, it's beautiful. You read in the storybooks about a perfect crime. Daddy, this is it. I've already put the thing into operation, the gears are meshing like crazy. Everybody is going to be protected. Nobody is going to be able to put the finger on anybody. And everybody's going to be protected a hundred percent. One hundred percent. You're going to be out—clean, clear, a hundred percent. And you'll probably wind up marrying that Adrienne Moore of yours and live happily ever after."

"No."

"You don't want to live happily ever after?"

"I don't want to—"

"You don't want to kill her, Mr. Blinney. Is that it?"

"Are you mad? Of course I don't!"

"Well, you're not going to, pal. I am. I'm going to kill her on your behalf. I'm going to do you the biggest favor that ever happened, except, actually, I'm not a hundred percent samaritan. I figure to make a score on this myself. A nice lovely score for me, and a nice lovely score for you, only different kinds of scores. Me? I'll have loot to burn. You? You'll have Adrienne Moore, and you'll get married, and you'll live happily ever after."

"No!" said Oscar Blinney.

"Yes!" said Bill Grant. "Wait'll I tell you. You're not going to be able to resist this, Mr. Blinney. Not even you."

XII

BILL GRANT ROSE up from his chair and went to the slide-door of a shallow closet and slid the door and said, "I have bourbon and I have Scotch. What's your preference, Mr. Blinney?"

"Scotch," said Blinney.

Bill Grant tipped bottles to tumblers, added tap water from the bathroom, brought a drink to Blinney and held a drink for himself. "I must first give you a pro-

logue, Mr. Blinney. I must first tell you about me. I'm a guy that's been looking for the big score all his life," said Bill Grant. "Sure, I've earned money in my time. Oh, I can't deny that. Five hundred a week. A thou a week. Two thousand a week.

"But that's money that you spend. It's not money, like capital. It's not a hunk you can throw into a stock market, and if you get lucky, you're a big man. It's not a lump that you can operate from. I've always been looking for that lump, for a piece all together, for a big score. Can you understand that, Mr. Blinney?"

Blinney said nothing.

"This bum whom you married came down to Havana with a proposition which she thought I'd tie on to. I didn't. The take wasn't big enough, and the mark—that's you—might shake it off. But the more she talked, the more I grew interested, because there were angles present that that idiot had no conception of. So I came back here to the States and checked and checked and checked. And you gain, and I gain, and there is no risk, and we get rid of what we don't want. Are you with me, Mr. Blinney?"

Blinney still said nothing.

"You're not the talkative type, are you?"

"No," said Blinney.

Grant went to the drawer of a rickety desk, opened it, extracted long green sheets, and brought them to Blinney. "Recognize?" he said.

"What the hell are you doing with these?"

"Part of my research, Mr. Blinney. The payroll sheets that you'd study at home." He sat down, and scanned the green sheets. He read from them: "Martin Aircraft. Number of employees, six hundred and fifty five. Total payroll, seventy thousand dollars. Fifty-five thousand in one hundred dollar bills. Five thousand in fifties. The rest in smaller bills. Hughes Construction. Number of employees, five hundred and Forty. Total payroll, sixty thousand dollars . . ." His voice droned on and on.

"I didn't need the reading," said Blinney. "I know those figures."

"But do you understand the significance of those figures, Mr. Blinney?"

"Actually, they are approximations. Each set is for the week before."

"Now don't go banker on me, Mr. Blinney. Do you understand the significance?"

"What significance?"

Grant's chuckle came from his chest. "Oh, you weird banker innocents. This significance, Mr. Blinney. Before distribution into all the little pay-envelopes, before the armored cars make their trips, before that whole big-deal opera-

tion of distribution, there's like three hundred thousand dollars sitting nice and quiet in your cage-drawer, and like two hundred and fifty thousand of that—a quarter of a million bucks—is in large bills without earmarks. It is coming through to you, Mr. Blinney?"

Blinney squinted in disbelief, shook his head as though in remonstrance to a mischievous child, said nothing, drank.

Grant returned the payroll sheets to the drawer, went to the closet, and came back with an attache case. He opened it. "Notice, Mr. Blinney. An attache case, but a rather deep one, deeper than the usual kind." He stared down at Blinney who was gazing up at him. Blinney was still squinting disbelief.

"This case," said Bill Grant, "will hold two hundred and fifty thousand dollrs in packages of one-hundred and fifties. I know. I measured. I used a dummy package. Of course it didn't contain hundreds. It contained singles. But hundreds are no thicker than singles, are they, Mr. Blinney?"

"You're crazy," said Blinney.

"Like a fox, I'm crazy."

"You can't possibly think you can get away with anything like this. What's the matter with you?"

Grant restored the attache case to the closet, and made drinks for both of them. He sipped and Blinney sipped and then he placed his glass beside the gun and leaned, easily and gracefully, against the mantel.

"I've cased that joint many times, your First National Mercantile. I've studied the entire layout. For instance, the south door lets you out practically at the entrance to the subway on Thirty-fourth Street. Did you know that?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that the south door is thirty-seven paces from your cage; thirty-seven paces of a normal man walking? Did you know *that,* Mr. Blinney?"

"No."

"And the subway station right outside the door—the platform downstairs extends all the way to Thirty-sixth Street. As a matter of fact, if you put in your token and become part of that subway system, there's a ramp underneath that goes practically to Thirty-eighth Street, with exits leading out to each street. Did you know that, Mr. Blinney?"

"Yes, yes, I know that."

"I just want you to know that *I* know all of that, Mr. Blinney. Man, I've had six weeks of concentration on this. And I also know about alarm signals, and motion picture cameras that start shooting at the press of a button, and the four guards that patrol the floor with loaded guns in their holsters, and I don't give a damn for any of that. Now I'd like to show you some more, Mr. Blin-

ney." He went again to the desk-drawer, extracted several objects, brought them to Blinney. "First take a look at these," he said.

Blinney looked. He saw two tickets for a plane flight to London.

"Non-stop," said Bill Grant. "Notice the date?"

"August eighteenth."

"Which is tomorrow. And tomorrow is a Thursday. Flight time, by the way, is three o'clock in the afternoon." He slipped the tickets into his pocket, handed Blinney another object. "You know what that is, don't you, Mr. Blinney?"

"Passport."

"Well, look at it, please. Examine it. Don't be bashful."

Blinney examined. He saw a passport, in perfect order, made out to one William Granville. He saw a photo of a smooth-shaven young man wearing glasses.

"Did you ever meet William Granville?" said Bill Grant.

"No," said Oscar Blinney.

"You're talking to him," said Bill Grant.

"You?" said Blinney, looking up. "But, but—"

And now Bill Grant placed the last object in his hands, a pair of glasses, upon the bridge of his nose. "Clean-shaven and with my specs, I'm William Granville. And you have the signal honor, Mr. Blinney, outside of official-stuff, official documents, you know—you have the signal honor of being the first person in *my* adult life to have become acquainted with Mr. William Granville."

"I tell you you're crazy, Mr. . . . Mr. . . ."

"Stick to Grant, Mr. Blinney."

"You're crazy, Mr. Grant."

"You'll change your mind before I'm through, Mr. Blinney." He removed the glasses, took the passport from Blinney, brought them to the mantel, deposited them. He sipped his drink, smiled. "I'm still up at the Silver Crest, you know." He waved a hand. "I retained this princely abode about three weeks ago—as Bill Grant, of course. I paid a month's rent in advance. Nobody knows about this place—except you, now. I've probably been here three times before today."

"But why?" Blinney sipped, sighed. "Mr. Grant, you're probably older than I am, but I should like to give you some fatherly advice. I'm afraid that you, as so many others who have deluded themselves before you, has worked out, or *thinks* he has worked out, some airtight, foolproof, elaborate—"

"Shut up!"

Blinney shrugged.

"Now let me tell you what this room contains, Mr. Blinney. Aside from these little personal effects that I showed you, there is a scissors, a razor, and shaving cream. There is also a blue suit, a

white shirt, a blue tie, a pair of blue socks, and a pair of black shoes. There is also the attache case and these couple of bottles of whiskey and there is nothing else. Oh! Let me show you the shoes. You'll like that."

"Shoes?" said Blinney.

Grant brought a pair of black slip-on-type shoes from the closet. He held them in one hand as he stood before Blinney, holding himself tall and erect. "First observe me now."

Once more Blinney shrugged. He sipped, nodded. "I have observed you."

Grant kicked out of the shoes he was wearing and slipped on the new ones. He stood straight. "Now observe," he said.

Blinney instantly noted the difference. "But . . . but . . . how . . . I don't understand . . ."

"Vanity," said Bill Grant. "The other shoes are custom-made, built-up. With those, I'm six feet. These are regular shoes. With these, I'm five feet ten inches. Two inches make a vast difference in the height of an individual."

"You're right," said Blinney. "No question."

"I'll be wearing the built-up ones when I visit you tomorrow."

"Visit? Me? Are you back on that . . . ?"

Grant drank, then seated himself opposite Blinney. "Now you listen to me, pal. And listen real hard. Tomorrow morning, at about

ten o'clock, Bill Brant shall leave his room at the Silver Crest Motel. He shall go to the office, ask to use the office typewriter, type out a note, and place this into his pocket. He shall be wearing these high-heeled shoes and a neat grey suit. He shall be carrying a large suitcase which shall be practically empty. He shall take a taxi to the railroad station and take a train to New York. He shall arrive, by train scheduled, at eleven-forty Have you followed that, Mr. Blinney?"

"Yes."

"Arriving in New York, he shall

purchase a box of cigars, and he shall ask to have that wrapped in plain brown paper. Then he shall come here to this flea-trap, rest, pace, prowl, whatever, until the proper time. At the proper time, leaving his large and empty suitcase here, he shall take up his box of cigars in the plain brown-paper wrapping, and his empty attache case, and he shall go to the First National Mercantile Bank.

"He shall arrive there at twenty-five minutes to one, a crowded hour, and he shall get on the line in front of the cage of Mr. Oscar Blinney. When his turn comes, he shall give Mr. Blinney the typewritten note. Mr. Blinney shall comply with the directions contained in the note. Won't you, Mr. Blinney?"

"No. No, I won't."

"Yes you will. For a number of reasons. The first reason—the contents of the note. The note states that the bearer has knowledge of the payrolls waiting in your drawer. The note states that the bearer is carrying, under his left arm, a highly explosive bomb. If he drops it, it will wreck the bank, kill you, kill him, and kill at least fifty others. And you'll do exactly what the note tells you to do, Mr. Blinney."

"I won't."

"Oh, you will. And nobody can blame you, can they? A bomb threat, which is not only a threat to you and to the bearer, but to so many innocent people who are in the bank."

Blinney said nothing. He finished the drink and set the glass on the floor.

"After you have complied, Mr. Blinney, I shall exit by the south door. Immediately, I shall enter into the subway, insert a prepared token into the turnstile, walk the ramp to an exit at Thirty-seventh Street, take a taxi to the East Side, and walk the rest of the way back to this flea-trap here. The rest is simple. Is it beginning to come to you, Mr. Blinney?"

Blinney made no answer.

"Once here, I work quickly and effortlessly, for the remainder is so charmingly simple. I shave off the beard. I change into the clothes that are here: the blue suit, the normal shoes, all. Then everything —*everything*—attache case and all, gets dumped into the big suitcase. There shall be no trace whatever of any living soul in this room. All fingerprints shall be wiped away. That was done also up at Silver Crest, and done to the note that was handed to you. You leave that to me. I'm an expert at that.

"And then I depart, clip out the name GRANT from the bell downstairs, and take a taxicab to the airport. And then, what have we, Mr. Blinney? What have we? What's the matter? You look a little green around the gills? What have we, Mr. Blinney?"

Blinney was silent.

"I'll tell you what we have, Mr. Blinney. We have a sensational bank robbery. We have police scurrying around, headlines in newspapers, detectives detecting, experts deducing, excitement, run-around, satements from officials, viewing of rogues' gallery pictures, and a round-up of all known criminals using that *modus operandi* for a bank heist. That's what we have on one hand.

"On the other hand, we have the complete disappearance of an individual known as Bill Grant. We have, while the police are searching for a six-feet-tall bearded man who might be pin-pointed as one Bill Grant, a small, simple, clean-shaven fellow wearing glasses named William Granville taking up his reservation on a plane bound for London, and taking with him Bill Grant into oblivion. The bearded man will never be found. The crime, as other major crimes of which we have heard, will never be solved. Period. There we have it, Mr. Blinney. Who's crazy now?"

Oscar Blinney said not one word. He could feel the perspiration upon his face and his scalp itchily crinkled with sweat.

"We're going to swing it, Mr. Blinney. *The—perfect—crime!*" He was silent for a moment, standing motionless in front of Blinney. "Do you know why you're going to co-operate?"

"Why?" Blinney rose, towering. *"Why, why—why, damn you?"*

"Because your problem is insurmountable. Because you married a psychopathic witch who'll drag you into filth and then drag you deeper. Because there is no out for you, Mr. Blinney, no escape—except one, and it's so perfect, it's beautiful."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about your release from Evangeline Ashley, your one release, your one escape. I'm talking about the death of a nothing, a cockroach stepped on, an insect squashed—and freedom at last—clean, clear, sweet, final freedom at last—for a poor sucker that got in so far over his head that he's drowning."

"No!" The room was hot. Spots whirled before Blinney's eyes.

"She's leaving you, pal. And that would be more scandal, wouldn't it? She's running out on you, baby. She's running away. With—guess who? With me."

"What the hell?" said Blinney. "What the hell?"

"Not with William Granville, Mr. Blinney. She's never heard of William Granville. She *thinks* she's running away with Bill Grant. It's all fixed. She thinks she's leaving with me tomorrow morning. She thinks Bill Grant is going to London to make the big score. She thinks she's going to London with Bill Grant. That's why I have *two* plane tickets; you remember, I

showed you *two* tickets. Do you remember, Mr. Blinney? Do you?"

"Yes."

"Tomorrow morning she comes, bag packed, to the Silver Crest Motel. She thinks she will be leaving with Bill Grant. She will not be leaving with Bill Grant. Bill Grant will leave on schedule, but she'll remain in the room, and she won't be going anywhere or saying anything because she'll be dead, Mr. Blinney, *very dead.*"

Blinney felt his knees sag.

"You look pale, Mr. Blinney. You want another drink?"

"No."

"The chambermaid comes to clean at three in the afternoon. That's when they'll find her. There'll be no question who killed her. Her lover killed her. Oh, we've been seen around, plenty. In a way, you'll be a martyr, Mr. Blinney. People will sympathize with you. You had nothing to do with it. You were at work. Her lover killed her, and let them try and find that lover.

"Lover-boy has completely disappeared. Lover-boy has been swallowed up. Lover-boy will never be heard from again. And so, without doing a thing—not one damned thing, really—you're out of your miseries, and I've hit my big score, and we've knocked off a perfect crime. But perfect, Daddy—and everybody lives happily ever after. Beautiful, Mr. Blinney? Beautiful?"

Blinney touched a tongue to parched lips. He said nothing.

"And just in case it's turning around in your mind that I might pull a fast one on you, Mr. Blinney, I give you the right to check it out any way you please, but discreet. By ten o'clock, she's dead. She doesn't figure to be found before three. Any time between ten and three you can do you check, but if you do, you must work it discreet.

"I advise against it because a stumble-bum like you might gum up the works. I wouldn't pull a fast one—why should I? You're my ace in the hole for a tremendous score—why shouldn't I hold up my end? Furthermore, she's going to be cooled out by Bill Grant, and by three o'clock Bill Grant no longer exists. And still furthermore, if Bill Grant doesn't do his job at the Silver Crest, you can always let out a tip about William Granville in London. Makes sense, doesn't it? Doesn't it, Mr. Blinney. Who's crazy now? Suppose you tell me that."

The room was hot. There was no ventilation. The air was stagnant. Blinney sopped air through an open mouth. His breathing was rapid and shallow. His head was hot, there was a pain just above his eyes, and his hands and feet were wet and cold. He drifted toward the door as in a void, detached, sucking for air, noisily, through the open mouth.

"Just a minute!" Grant's voice was sharp.

Blinney stopped.

"Just in case you get any ideas, Mr. Blinney, like about going to the cops, you'd wind up in a mess of trouble, why, the troubles you've got now would seem like Paradise. You know what I'd tell them?"

Blinney made no answer, gasping, pulling for air through the open mouth.

"Talk, damn you!"

"I . . . I don't know," Blinney whispered.

"I'd tell them that all of this was *your* idea. I'd tell them about your wife whom you hated and despised and who hated and despised you, and she'd back me up on that. And I'd tell them that you dreamed up this idea—that for croaking your wife while you have the alibi of being at work on the job, you gave me the in on a terrific heist. I'd even show them those payroll sheets and tell them that you gave them to me as the convincer. Man, you'd be in a hell of a jam, wouldn't you? So just don't you forget that."

Blinney opened the door.

"Have a good night's sleep, Mr. Blinney. The more you think about it, the better you'll like it. Actually, if you consider, you're going to wind up with more benefit than I."

Blinney closed the door. The steep wooden stairs creaked beneath his weight.

XIII

ON THE EIGHTEENTH day of August, Oscar Blinney arrived at his post at the First National Mercantile Bank at six minutes to nine. It was a hot day but the interior of the bank was cool.

At twelve noon the bank began to seethe with lunch-hour customers, and the lines began to form in front of the cages. At 12:25, Blinney had completed his payrolls. At 12:41, the customer in front of his window was a tall, dark, slender, bearded man, neatly dressed in an expensive grey suit. He had a brown-paper parcel beneath his left arm and he carried a leather attache case in his right hand.

The bearded man set down the attache case, drew a slip of paper from a pocket, and passed it through the slot beneath Blinney's window. The routine of the bank hummed normally as Blinney looked down upon the paper. It bore a message typed in capital letters.

I HAVE A BOMB UNDER MY LEFT ARM. IF I DROP IT, YOU WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING BOTH OF US.

I KNOW YOUR DRAWER HAS PAYROLLS FOR THE MARTIN, HUGHES, FAIRFAX, NORTH AMERICAN, AND MARSHALL COMPANIES.

PUT $250,000 IN PACKAGES OF HUNDREDS AND FIFTIES INTO MY

ATTACHE CASE. I AM WATCHING YOU AND COUNTING WITH YOU, SO DO NOT TRY TO GET SMART.

DO NOT GIVE ANY ALARM OR THE BANK BLOWS UP. I WILL GO OUT THROUGH THE SOUTH DOOR. ONCE I AM OUT, YOU CAN DO WHAT THE HELL YOU LIKE.

WARNING! I AM HOLDING ENOUGH EXPLOSIVE TO WRECK THE ENTIRE BUILDING! I DO NOT CARE ABOUT MY LIFE. IF YOU CARE ABOUT YOURS AND THE OTHER PEOPLE HERE, DO NOT TRY ANY TRICKS. HURRY!

Blinney moved the slip of paper aside and looked out upon the bearded man. The bearded man seemed to wink, seemed to nod, but there was no expression on his face. Blinney unlocked and raised his window. The bearded man pushed through the attache case.

Blinney opened it and quickly, expertly laid in the packages of money. Bank routine hummed normally. There was no pressure. There was no interference. The transaction was completed in a few minutes, and then Blinney lowered the top of the case, clicked shut its locks, and pushed it out to the bearded man who took hold of it.

"Thank you," said the bearded man, quietly, smiling.

"Sir," said Blinney.

"Yes, what is it?" said the bearded man.

"Just this," said Oscar Blinney.

He took his pistol from the drawer and shot the bearded man through the bridge of the nose and shot him again through the right eye and as the bearded man splashed blood and fell out of sight, Oscar Blinney fainted.

Uproar!

Customers scattered. Tellers dropped in their cages. Flunkies dived beneath desks on the balcony. Vice presidents demanded the priority of protocol beneath selfsame desks. Men bellowed. Guards ran. Girls screamed. Guards ran. Men screamed. Girls bellowed. Guards ran. And ran and ran. Alarms went off. Buttons were pushed. Motion picture cameras started taking motion pictures. Phones were used. Doors were locked. Power was shut off. Elevators stopped in midair. Police sirens howled on the streets. Traffic became entangled. Patrol cars converged.

And patrol cars were abandoned, doors hanging open, as policemen ran, as the guards had run. Everybody ran, to and fro, and areas were roped off. And orders were barked. And barked and barked. And guards panted. And policemen panted. And tunics were opened. And notebooks appeared. And questions were asked. And questions were answered.

And everybody was told to keep back, as everybody is always told to keep back, and everybody kept

back. And all the while one man lay dead and another lay comatose, until Detective-lieutenant Leonard Burr appeared, and a semblance of order pierced the confusion.

Detective-lieutenant Leonard Burr was fifty years of age, tall, slim, grizzled, polite, competent, and experienced. He stood by patiently while a police surgeon declared the bearded man dead and declared Oscar Blinney alive. Restoratives were administered to Blinney, and he was set back upon his feet. He watched, alertly though wanly, as Detective-lieutenant Leonard Burr did skillful research upon the corpse.

The detective-lieutenant produced, from the clothing of the bearded man, a loaded Luger, a key, $32.60 in cash money, and a wallet which identified its owner as one Bill Grant with an address in Havana. The wallet contained a lush color-photo of a voluptuous blonde in a Bikini bathing suit, and a receipt in the sum of $84.00 in payment of one month's rent for furnished room number 1 A at 233 East 33rd Street.

Detective-lieutenant Burr was about to relinquish the cadaver to the panting policemen when he noticed the shoes. "Hey, dig them boots," he said. "Custom-built and with heels what they used to call Cuban heels. Them heels must be built up two-three inches. Hold everything."

He pulled the shoes from the body and then surrendered the body to the panting policemen. He smiled upon Blinney and then bent to the brown-paper-wrapped parcel and carefully undid it. He exposed an aromatic wooden box, lifted its lid, and found it fully packed with fresh cigars.

He went to a phone and was put through to the Havana police. He identified himself, stated his business, requested information about Bill Grant at the address he found in the wallet, and told where he could be reached upon return call. Then he collected all of the evidence including the attache case full of money, the typewritten note, Blinney's pistol, and Blinney, and repaired to the station house where he was joined by Assistant District Attorney John Rogers, young, intelligent, ambitious, and Harvard-trained.

"I have only a sketchy outline of the events," he said to Lieutenant Burr.

"There's your man," said Burr, pointing to Blinney.

"You're the teller?" said Rogers.

"Yes, sir," said Blinney. "Oscar Blinney."

"As long as you're here, John," said Burr, "you may as well ask the questions for the official statement."

Under the gentle prod of the Assistant District Attorney, Blinney told his story and signed the

transcript in his neat hand.

"We're going over to two thirty-three East Thirty-third Street where this Bill Grant seems to have had a furnished room," said Burr. "Would you like to come with us, Mr. Blinney?"

"If I won't be in the way," said Blinney.

"You won't be in the way."

They went in a small silent group: Burr, Rogers, Blinney, the two detectives, and a uniformed policeman. The key found on Grant opened the downstairs door and the door of 1 A. The uniformed policeman was stationed outside the door, and the two detectives, under the brisk direction of Lieutenant Burr, did an effective search of the room.

They accumulated the following articles: a large suitcase, a passport, a pair of glasses, payroll sheets from the First National Mercantile Bank, two airplane tickets for a flight to London, a neatly pressed blue suit, a white shirt, a blue tie, a pair of blue socks, a pair of black shoes, a scissors, a razor, and an air-pressure can of foam-up shaving cream.

Before any examination was made, one of the detectives, a fingerprint expert, dusted for prints. "Nothing," he announced. "Not on the bottles, not on the glasses, nowhere. This guy was sure shaping up to take a powder."

"Natch," said Lieutenant Burr.

He opened the suitcase. It contained one set of underwear, a pair of slacks, a sport shirt, a sport jacket, and an unsealed envelope marked at its corner MOUNT VERNON SAVINGS BANK. He opened the envelope. It contained eighty one-hundred-dollar bills. He replaced the bills into the envelope, returned everything into the suitcase, and closed it.

He took up the passport, studied it, picked up the glasses, tried them on, then turned over passport and glasses to Assistant District Attorney John Rogers. Rogers examined, smiled, nodded. Then Burr handed him the two plane tickets.

"Get it?" he said.

"Of course," said Rogers. "He comes back here, shaves, puts on the glasses, dumps everything into the suitcase, cleans up the rest of any fingerprints, puts on these clothes, and he's off to London as William Granville."

Burr was holding the shoes, inspecting them. "And when he gets there," he said, "not only is he clean-shaven, and a guy with glasses, but he's two inches shorter." He looked about. "No phone here," he said to one of the detectives. "Take those plane tickets, go out to a phone, and check them."

He handed some sheets to Blinney. "Do you recognize these?"

Blinney studied them briefly and returned them. "Yes, sir," he said.

"What are they, please?"

"Payroll sheets."

"Whose?" Lieutenant Burr asked.

"Mine."

"What are they doing here, Mr. Blinney?"

Blinney shrugged. "I haven't the faintest idea, sir."

"Did you ever take them out of the bank?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I've frequently taken my sheets out of the bank."

"What for?"

"Purposes of study, sir. To know what to expect the next week. To expedite matters. To be able to work more quickly. It's not an unusual practice, sir. Actually, these sheets have no value once they've outlived their purpose."

Burr handed him the sheets again. "Did you ever take *these* sheets out of the bank, Mr. Blinney?"

Blinney studied them more carefully. "They're old sheets, sir, as you can see from the date, about a month old. Yes, I'd say I did take these sheets out. Of course I'm not quite certain which sheets I'd take for study, but I'd say yes, I believe I took these sheets."

"And where would you take such sheets for study, Mr. Blinney?"

"Home, of course." Blinney returned the sheets.

"And where's home?"

"Mount Vernon. I gave my full address when I gave my statement. Don't you remember, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, yes, I remember," said the lieutenant, grumpily.

There was a knock and the detective with the plane tickets entered. "Verified," he said. "William Granville had reservations for a flight at three o'clock." He looked at his watch. "He'd have taken off in twenty minutes."

"Okay," said Lieutenant Burr. "Let's us take off right now. Bring all this stuff."

And at the precinct house he was handed a typewritten sheet by a shirt-sleeved detective. "From the Havana police," said the shirt-sleeved detective.

Burr read, turned the sheet over to Rogers, said to Blinney: "The guy was a soldier of fortune type, a first-rate gambler, worked some of the big casinos in Havana. Also operated out of Miami. Was known as Bill Grant, no other name. A dangerous guy, quick with a gun or knife, and a bear with the dames."

Rogers laid away the typewritten sheet, sat glumly.

A detective entered with a large manilla envelope. "Photos and photostats of everything," he said.

"Thanks," said Burr. "Put it on my desk."

The detective complied and departed.

"You know what's bothering me, don't you?" said John Rogers.

"You bet I know," said Burr. "The same damn thing that's bothering me. This thing is wide

open. Not closed by a long shot. Mr. Blinney got one—but there's another ugly son running around somewhere: the guy who was going to use the second plane ticket we found at Grant's."

He sat down near the teletype machine, lit a cigarette, smoked thoughtfully. "It's going to go one of two ways. We're either looking for somebody who got those payroll sheets out of Mr. Blinney's home—or it's someone at the bank."

"Someone at the *bank*?" said Rogers.

"Remember that Mr. Blinney isn't *certain* that he took *those* sheets home. If he didn't, then maybe someone in the bank copped them and turned them over to this Bill Grant. Then that's Mr. Accomplice, and we're looking for him."

"Don't forget about that three o'clock flight time," said Rogers.

"Oh, I'm not forgetting. We're going to have to do a complete check of that bank for anybody who would be free by two o'clock today. And also, Mr. Blinney—and I'm sorry if it will inconvenience you—we're going to have to do a complete check on your household; all your friends; all your wife's friends; servants; anybody who could have laid their hands on those payroll sheets, *if* you brought them home. I thought, for a change, I had an easy one. But this damned case is still wide open in my book. Understand?"

There was silence. Burr smoked. The teletype clacked. Burr's gaze drifted toward it. Burr stopped smoking. The clacking continued. He read:

HOMICIDE. MT. VERNON. SILVER CREST MOTEL. VICTIM FEMALE. DISCOVERED BY CLEANING WOMAN. VICTIM FEMALE FOUND IN ROOM RENTED TO MR. AND MRS. BILL GRANT. VICTIM TENTATIVELY IDENTIFIED FROM EFFECTS AS ONE EVANGELINE ASHLEY. CHECK OF LICENSE PLATES OF MOTOR VEHICLE DRIVEN BY VICTIM FEMALE REVEALS OWNERSHIP BY ONE OSCAR BLINNEY. FOLLOW-UP REVEALS OSCAR BLINNEY, PRESENT RESIDENCE MT. VERNON, MARREID AN EVANGELINE ASHLEY LAST MARCH IN MIAMI BEACH. CONTACT OSCAR BLINNEY EMPLOYED IN FIRST NATIONAL MERCANTILE BANK IN NEW YORK CITY.

The machine stopped. The silence swelled. Detective-lieutenant Leonard Burr, sighed, rose, squeezed out his cigarette.

"Mr. Blinney," he said.

"Yes?" said Blinney.

"We have a report," said the lieutenant, touching a finger to the teletype. "Just came in. Nothing definite."

"Report?" said Blinney.

"Nothing definite, Mr. Blinney."

"I don't understand."

"There's been an accident."

"Accident?" said Blinney.

"Worse, possibly."

"What?" stammered Blinney.

"Report on a homicide."

"Homicide?" said Blinney. "What has that to do with me?"

"Tentative," said Burr.

"Tentative. I don't understand, sir."

"Tentative identification of victim. Evangeline Ashley."

"Oh no . . ."

"Tentative is no sure-pop, Mr. Blinney. You never can tell."

"What? . . . Please . . . What happened . . .?"

"Silver Crest Motel up near Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon police request we contact Oscar Blinney at the First National Mercantile. The woman, it seems, was found in a room rented to a Mr. and Mrs. Bill Grant."

Suddenly the lieutenant moved. He went quickly to the wallet of Bill Grant, extracted a color-photo, and brought it to Oscar Blinney. "Do you know this woman?" he said.

"Yes," said Oscar Blinney and for the second time that day he fainted.

"The poor goof," said Detective-lieutenant Leonard Burr, bending to the stricken Blinney. "He's sure having a rough afternoon, isn't he?"

XIV

THE SAME GROUP sped north, siren open, on the West Side Highway: Burr, Rogers, Blinney, the two detectives, and the uniformed policeman. The policeman drove. Beside him sat one of the detectives, the manilla envelope in his lap. Beside the detective sat Burr, plucking upon his lower lip.

In the rear Blinney sat between John Rogers and the other detective. Assistant District Attorney John Rogers, Phi Beta Kappa, young, intelligent, ambitious, Harvard-trained, talked with Oscar Blinney, quietly, patiently, incisively, compassionately. He learned that Oscar Blinney had been married in Miami in March. He learned that Oscar Blinney's wife had spent most of the month of June on vacation in Havana.

"We have proximity, two ways," said John Rogers. "Evangeline Ashley may have become acquainted with Bill Grant in Miami prior to her marriage to you, or in Havana after her marriage to you. Did she ever mention the name to you?"

"No," said Blinney.

"Neither Grant nor Granville?"

"No," said Blinney.

"Did you ever talk with your wife about business affairs?"

"Of course," said Blinney.

"Did she ever see those payroll sheets of yours, the ones that you brought home from time to time?"

"Yes, I'm quite certain that she did. Is it considered improper for a man to take his wife into confidence, to show her—"

"No, no. Please don't misun-

derstand, Mr. Blinney. I'm not criticizing. Not at all. This is part of my job, as it is part of Lieutenant Burr's job—acquiring facts and piecing them together, trying to make a whole of the parts. No criticism involved, Mr. Blinney. Quite the contrary."

Detective-lieutenant Leonard Burr wielded his compassion in his own manner. "Quiet in back, for Chrissake," he said. "I'm trying to think up front."

At the Silver Crest Motel, the experienced lieutenant and the bright assistant district attorney, assisted by the Mount Vernon police, quickly patched the parts into the whole. Blinney identified the dead woman as his wife. Her throat had been expertly severed by a switch-knife with a six-inch blade, found beside her body. Its blade was bloody but its hilt had been wiped clean of prints.

The room had been rented to Mr. Bill Grant who had signed in for Mr. and Mrs. Bill Grant. The manager identified Bill Grant from a photo taken from the manilla envelope. Residents of the Silver Crest Motel, especially the ladies, described Mr. Grant as quiet, unassuming, and so very handsome with that cute little beard and all; his wife had an important job in New York City—interior decorator, he had said—and she came up often in the afternoons, and sometimes she stayed over, and sometimes she stayed over in the city. Sometimes they both got a little drunk in the Silver Crest Tavern, but never offensive, always gay and charming.

This morning she had arrived at about nine o'clock in that little blue sedan. She had carried a suitcase. She had gone directly to her husband's room. He had come out at about ten o'clock, also carrying a suitcase. He had asked at the office if he could use a typewriter. (Photostat of the bomb-threat note disclosed at once, by expert comparison, that it had been typed upon the office typewriter of Silver Crest Motel.) He had then called for a taxi and had been driven to the station.

At three o'clock the chambermaid had knocked upon the door. There had been no answer. She had tried the knob, found the door unlocked, entered, and screamed. Mrs. Grant was on the floor, red with blood. Police, checking the suitcase, discovered that it was heavily packed, as though for a long trip.

In her handbag they found a passport in the name of Evangeline Ashley, renewed and in perfect order. In her handbag they also found a cancelled bank book on the Mount Vernon Savings Bank. She had withdrawn, that morning, $8070. Inquiry at the bank had elicited the fact that it had been paid out in eighty one-hundred-dollar bills and seven ten-dollar bills. Seven ten-dollar

bills—aside from two single dollars and small change—had been found in her handbag. There was no other money amongst her effects.

"That punk didn't miss a trick," said Lieutenant Burr. "She must have divided the money, keeping the hundred-dollar bills in the envelope furnished by the bank, and putting the tens, separately, into her purse. The punk grabbed the bank envelope, which we found in his suitcase downtown."

"In a way, a break for Mr. Blinney," said John Rogers. "That eight thousand, in view of all of the circumstances, found in the very envelope of the Mount Vernon Savings Bank, earmarks it as hers. Mr. Blinney won't have any trouble in claiming it as part of the estate."

"We are in agreement, Mr. District Attorney," said Lieutenant Burr, raising a glass. "To your very good health."

"Drink hearty," said John Rogers, drinking heartily.

They were seated in a booth, alone, in the Silver Crest Tavern. They were imbibing refreshment of Scotch and soda. They were awaiting the return of Oscar Blinney who was assisting the Mount Vernon police in disposing of the details of a homicide in their district and who were, in turn, assisting Oscar Blinney in the arrangements for the disposal of the victim of such homicide.

"Punk or no punk," said John Rogers. "The man had well-nigh worked out a perfect crime."

"Perfect crime." Burr shook his head. "There's always some goof-ball like this Blinney to ruffle it up."

"But you were worried back there for a while, weren't you?"

"Yeah. The thing had some wide open edges."

"All closed now, wouldn't you say, Lieutenant?"

"You know it. Else we wouldn't be sitting here, relaxing." Burr sipped, put down his glass, half closed his eyes. "Perfect crime. I'll admit the punk really figured out a good one. Started natural, but then it developed some real crazy wrinkles. Started natural — a chronic goniff, a charm-boy, catches up with a chick who's a cheater. Started in the usual way."

"And in the middle, a rather naive chap—Oscar Blinney."

"You're a lawyer, you call him naive. I'm a cop, I call him a goof, a goof-ball, a rube, a yoke. Oh! a nice sweet fella, I sure have nothing against him, you know? Okay. The charm-boy makes the cheater and he finds out the husband is a great big honorable shnook who brings back homework for study and, man, the guy really handles big stuff. The wife turns over a couple of those payroll sheets and the idea for the big heist is born. Of course, she's sup-

posed to be cut on the take."

"But he's going to cut her out because he's working on a perfect crime. Perfect crime—there cannot be an accomplice."

"Good enough. So today's the day. Bill Grant knocks her off, and there's no longer an accomplice. He's not worried. If things work out—and I admit he planned an ingenious little masterpiece—there's no longer a Bill Grant. We could comb the country—no Bill Grant. Instead there's a William Granville, two inches shorter, smooth-shaven and bespectacled, living in London with a quarter of a million bucks working for him. If he'd have pulled it off, I think he'd have gotten away with it. But he didn't pull it off, did he?"

"Thanks to your goof-ball—Mr. Blinney."

"That's just the point. There's always some stupid stumble-bum who does the unexpected; a clown who bumbles into being a hero."

"Do you think it's ever happened, Lieutenant?"

"What?"

"The perfect crime?"

"I wouldn't know, because if it was a perfect crime—who *would* know? There have been unsolved crimes, of course, but, actually for a perfect crime, you just wouldn't know a crime was committed, would you?"

"True," said John Rogers. "Fascinating concept, though."

"Yeah, but so's Oscar Blinney a fascinating concept. Here's a clown who turns out to be a brave hero; actually a stupid goof-ball who might have killed himself, wrecked a bank, and killed maybe a hundred people with him. Turns out the guy was carrying a box of cigars instead of a box of explosives—but our bumbling hero couldn't have known that, could he? Perfect crime? I nominate Oscar Blinney."

"Yeah, there's the one." Rogers laughed.

"A perfect candidate." And Detective-lieutenant Leonard Burr, seized with his joke and relaxed with Scotch, laughed until the tears streamed. "And why not?" he managed between spasms. "After all, who would think that kind of idiot could have the brains, the nerve, the skill, the flair, the audacity? Would you?"

"I certainly would," said John Rogers, and now he had made his joke, and he giggled, and then broke into guffaws caught in the contagion of laughter.

"Why, a chump like that would be out in front, right from the start." And Lieutenant Burr doubled over, stabbing knuckles at his tears. "Oh, man, it's a beautiful thought. Who could figure a boob like that could have it in him?"

"I could," said John Rogers, paroxysms pealing.

And they laughed and laughed. They laughed at Oscar Blinney.

And Lieutenant Burr called for

the check, and paid, and they laughed and laughed, hugely enjoying their joke. "All right, please, enough," said Lieutenant Burr. "Let's get out of here."

ON THE FIFTEENTH DAY of December, at the Grand Ballroom of the Commodore Hotel, to lengthy congratulatory speeches and enthusiastic applause, Oscar Blinney received the Heroism Award of the First National Mercantile Bank in the amount of $21,000. On the twenty-fourth day of December, Robert Allan McKnish, Credit Manager of the First National Mercantile Bank, tendered his resignation effective January the second.

Good things happen when you

On the third day of January, by unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, Oscar Blinney was appointed Credit Manager of the First National Mercantile Bank at a starting salary of $200 per week.

On the seventh day of January, Oscar Blinney married Adrienne Moore.

They lived happily ever after.

MIKE SHAYNE PRESENTS — Next Month's Headliners

RETURN OF A DEAD MAN by HELEN McCLOY

A great short novel with an unusual quality of utterly chilling suspense.

THE FATAL MESSAGE by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New Mike Shayne Novelet

THE STOLEN MASTERPIECE by JAMES HOLDING

A STITCH IN TIME by LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

DEATH BY FRIGHT

A case of mistaken identity can be very serious . . . for a killer.

by

HERBERT HARRIS

JOHN HOUCK clutched at his breast, wincing with pain, his hands gripping a chair-back for support. It was useless to tell himself he should be accustomed to these agonizing pangs by now. Each time a sharp pain stabbed at his heart it made him gasp.

As the spasm passed, he pulled open a drawer and took out the nitroglycerine tables which he had been using much too frequently during the past three weeks.

For three days now he had been forgetting to take them. There had been all this trouble over Sandra . . .

The telephone in his apartment began ringing, and he braced himself to answer it. "Hello . . . this is John Houck."

The voice at the other end of the wire was angry, contemptuous —the voice of Laurence Blair, movie actor, and amateur sportsman. "Houck, I asked you not to see Sandra again. I've warned you before, but I'll say it just once more. She's *through* with you. I wish to hell you'd realize that."

"You listen to me, Blair . . ." Houck could feel a hot flush mounting to his cheekbones. "I don't intend—"

"No, you listen," Blair cut in, his voice taking on a steely edge. "Sandra doesn't ever want to see you again. Try to get that into your thick head."

Blair paused an instant, then went on truculently. "Look, I don't intend to continue this conversation, it's too unpleasant. However, there's one other matter that's got to be straightened out. Remember that diamond ring you gave Sandra? I've told her to give it back to you."

"And I told her to keep it," Houck muttered, his voice choked with rage.

"She doesn't want to keep it. And I'd just as soon she didn't. As a matter of fact, I have it now. I'll see that it's returned to you."

"Now, look here, Blair—"

The receiver at the other end was slammed into its cradle. Houck stood staring first at the dead telephone, then at the framed snapshot of himself and Sandra at Palm Springs. Sudden anger overcame him. He struck savagely at the frame, smashing it against the wall and shattering the glass, splintering it to fragments and cutting his hand slightly.

Another twinge seared his heart, and he sat down trembling. A sliver of glass from the damaged picture frame lay by his foot. It was shaped like a dagger, and the ugly thoughts that had been crystalizing on a subconscious level were openly faced and accepted.

Houck knew that he wanted to kill Laurence Blair, that he had wanted to kill the man from the moment the actor had taken Sandra from him. Blair had dazzled her, of course, precisely as he had many more sophisticated women. Perhaps he had promised her a movie career?

He recalled the Sandra he had known, the almost plain-looking girl who might have married him and nursed him back to health, or at least made his life less bleak during the little time he had left. Blair had changed her, had made her seem almost beautiful.

Houck went to the drawer where he kept his nitroglycerine tablets. He looked at the knife that rested there, a hunting-knife with a fine tapering blade. He took it from the drawer and put it into his pocket.

It was nearly seven o'clock when he went out. The sun was sinking behind the houses. Soon he would be a shadowy figure with murder in his heart.

LIEUTENANT OF DETECTIVES Don Lake eyed the broken picture-frame in Houck's room, picked it up, and handed it to a sergeant in uniform. He then walked over to where Houck lay sprawled on the carpet near the door.

The doctor who had been examining the dead man got up. "Heart attack," he said. "Went

out like a light. It happens often enough."

Lake grunted and turned to look at the man who had put through the call to the police. "You're Charles Gough?"

"That's right," the man said. He was rather well dressed but somehow he did not have the look of a very prosperous or successful man.

"You were working for Laurence Blair?"

"I've worked for him, on and off, for some time," Gough said. "Small odd jobs, mostly. I also—"

"All right," Lake said. "Did you know that Blair was stabbed to death near his home at about seven o'clock? That was—" He glanced at his wrist-watch "—about three hours ago?"

Gough's pallor heightened. "No, I didn't know. That's—terrible. I didn't even—"

"When did you last see him?"

"This afternoon about five, maybe five-thirty. Mr. Blair gave me this package." He handed the package to the detective. "He said it was a diamond ring, and told me not to lose it."

"What did he want you to do with it?"

Gough swallowed. "He asked me to deliver it here." He nodded towards John Houck's body.

Lake nodded. "But you didn't bring it to Mr. Houck right away?"

"No, I had some other errand I had to do first. I didn't get here until after nine, not quite an hour ago."

"More than two hours after Blair was murdered," Lake said.

"I knew nothing about that," Gough protested quickly.

"All right, relax," the detective said. "What happened when you got here?"

"I rang the bell and Houck opened the door. I was going to hand the package to him when he made a choking noise and his face turned purplish. Then he collapsed—"

Lake was eyeing Gough thoughtfully. "Has anyone ever told you that you resemble Laurence Blair?" he said.

With a fleeting smile, Gough said, "That's how I got to know him. I doubled for him in some of his motion pictures, especially the stunt scenes. I wasn't related to him, but we were always taken for twins. A lot of people have mistaken me for Blair."

"Yes," Lake said thoughtfully. "Houck thought so too, apparently. Laurence Blair returned from the dead. Even a person with a *sound* heart might have died of fright."

The sergeant said, "The whole thing's damned peculiar. The girl in this snapshot looks exactly like one of Blair's girl friends."

Lake eyed him wryly. "You don't say," he said.

Charles Gough still looked vaguely bewildered.

"Some men are just about half bear, Marshal,"

Cluny said. "And all grizzlies are killers!"

MURDER LIKE A GRIZZLY

by THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY

MARSHAL WARING deeply respected his deputy, Tim Cluny, as a "bush man" but he was beginning to suspect the little nut-brown hunter with the child-blue eyes of having conned him into this whole investigation just for company while he surveyed the lands he meant to hunt that fall.

"We'll just climb up this side the glacier a little piece," Cluny had suggested casually down on

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the highway. "We can look right across onto Grizzly Bill's homestead and maybe figure what he might have done with his old lady."

The "little piece" of climb had been four thousand feet on this straight-up mountain. Now Cluny wanted to climb another two thousand feet to an overhanging promontory. The marshal had already reconnoitered the whole area by helicopter back in May, when there had been some doubt of Grizzly's report that his woman had just vanished on him. No suspicious sign or circumstance had turned up, then or since, except that Waring's all-Alaska inquiry had not located Grizzly Bill's woman anywheres else.

The case had been carried under nothing more exciting than "Missing Persons," until Tim Cluny showed up in Anchorage, mid-way of August, with the notion that she'd been murdered.

"What makes you think so?" the marshal had asked, hoping to pin down the seam-faced sourdough in a definite way.

"Well, she ain't come back to his homestead," Cluny said.

"Maybe she ran off with some other trapper or miner," Marshal Waring suggested.

"Now, marshal, who in hell would run off with that piece of bearbait?" Cluny asked logically.

There was no answer to that, even in the lonesome interior of Alaska. Grizzly Bill's vanished Annie had been bald, toothless, one-eyed, with a wooden leg made of green timber which had twisted and shortened as it seasoned. Further, she had a very short temper and was remarkably expert with a carving knife.

So the marshal had allowed Cluny to entice him out into this glacial wilderness, and now he was more or less in his deputy's hands until the investigation was completed. And he was damned disgruntled. His legs felt as though they'd been stretched the full four thousand feet of the climb. He was sure that all of the intense heat of the seventeen-hour summer sun was concentrated upon himself alone.

And now that he thought of it, there was nothing to be seen from here that they could not have seen from Grizzly's mountain, across the glacier. And they could have saved themselves the exhausting, back-breaking effort of an extra climb.

"What in pot," Waring rasped irritably, "do we gain if we climb on up to that damned promontory? We've already surveyed the glacier from the 'copter."

"Back in May," Cluny pointed out mildly. He hunkered on the balls of his insulated boots and whittled a nubbin of tobacco from an old fashioned brown-black plug. "That was before the snow bridges and drift snow melted,

marshal. Her body could have been in a crevasse right under you and you wouldn't have seen it."

The marshal silently conceded that point. He frowned out at the serene white swell of the frozen river that wound up between the mountains, rising up, and up, and up, until it blended with the sky. Although he had been in Alaska eighteen years, the vastness and timelessness of glaciers still filled him with an awe that disturbed his peace of mind and became almost menacing at times.

Cluny said, "Looks real purty and peaceable, don't it? Soft and purty as a woman. But every second of the day and night, that little old glacier's chewing up tons and tons of rock. You have to figure a sourdough by the country he lives in, and the animals around him, marshal."

"All right, so he's ruthless as a glacier and violent as a grizzly," Waring snapped. "What do we gain by climbing any more? If he's guilty and gets worried about what we're up to, he could pick us off like Dahl sheep with his telescopic rifle."

Cluny looked at him with mild reproof. "Marshal, don't you know you can't shoot across a glacier? The drafts rising off of there would damn near turn a bullet in a circle."

The marshal's face darkened but he took the correction in his stride. A townsman had a lot of things to learn about the bush. He sucked a deep lungful of air and got resignedly to his feet. "All right, drag me up where we can start the whole mountain landsliding," Waring grumbled. "It's a nice fast way of getting down, at least!"

Cluny grinned quietly and led off in a catlike climb. He figured they'd hit the promontory a few minutes before or after the sun swung behind the mountains in its long, almost horizontal traverse around three quadrants of the horizon. They reached the promontory and sprawled out, the marshal gasping, just as shadow began to wash down the gleaming whiteness between the mountains.

A sudden and startling transformation swept the ice. What had looked serene and smooth and gentle as a lovely woman's shoulder was abruptly cold blue-grey, upheaved, cracked, splotched and gouged. The incredibly blue lakes on the surface turned a cold zinc grey, like the thundering rivers that squeezed out of the ice at breakup. Pressure ridges crowded up in vicious welts. Crevasses yawned like hideous drunken mouths.

"Kee-ristmas!" Waring shivered. "Looking at that long enough could drive any man berserk!"

"Lot of country here for a man to pick a sensible place to live," Cluny noted. "Not even the animals live beside a glacier. Only

the Grizzlies and the goats. I figure he was berserk when he moved over yonder. Berserk and half-grizzly himself to start with."

"What's so different about a grizzly, except its size?" Waring asked.

Clung spat a brown gob of tobacco into space and watched it shredded and separated by the updrafts. "Well, for one thing, the grizzly is the only bear except a polar bear that will attack a man for no reason. And a polar bear has pretty good reason, come to think of it. He wants dinner. But a grizzly don't want anything, just something to chew on awhile and then to hide."

"They'll hide a man's body?"

"Yessirree, and they won't forget where it is, marshal. If a pack of wolves gets to nosing around, old Mr. Grizzly will go dig up that body just to move it. He's just that ornery."

He unslung his telescopic rifle and aimed on the grey slab of Grizzly Bill's lake, pulling down until he caught the side of the far glacier in his 'scope. There was a rim to the ice along Grizzly's shelf, an overlap that made a bridge from the rotten reddish shale that formed the flats out onto the surface. It was one of the few places where the glacier was not upheaved along the edges, or else sheered off in a rough faced, precipitous wall.

He lowered the gun a fraction more, bringing his sights out onto the glacier, coursing the way a hunter does when he follows a deer bounding through the bush. He steadied with a small breath of satisfaction. His breath made smoke in the air now that shadow had swept over them.

He watched for so long a time that the marshal grew chilled. "What in hell you looking at?" he demanded impatiently.

"Crevasse area," Cluny said laconically. He handed the marshal the rifle. "Bead on the lake and then draw in just above that ice-bridge from the shelf."

The marshal beaded and saw nothing but a lot of crevasses that made him think of a Dali painting. The 'scope formed a round picture, laid off in squares and quartered by the cross hairs. The picture was utterly motionless and utterly unchanging, except for the slow thickening of shadowtone. Then something happened in the picture.

The marshal thought he must have flinched and then knew that he had not even quivered. He had a boulder landmark at the edge of the 'scope, and it had not moved an iota. But something had happened, some fast movement, like the clicking of a camera shutter.

He scowled at Tim Cluny. "All right. I'm your sucker. What happened?"

"A crevasse closed," Cluny said.

The marshal twisted onto his

backside, very conscious that a malevolent gravity was seeking to roll him into space. "So, crevasses open and close all the time in August."

"Only some of 'em," Cluny said. "Some take their time about it, others open and close in a flash. You can set your watch on some, and others are more skittish than a woman."

"You think he tossed her down a crevasse?"

"He could have. A *'breather'* —one that opens and closes— would be the best hiding place he had at hand. If he did it in winter or spring, she'd have covered with drift and you wouldn't have seen a sign of her from the 'copter. By now, all that draft is melted away. At least from the edge of the crevasse, you could see her."

"Good lord, there are hundreds of those cracks we'd have to nose out! Not to mention the risk of a stakeout with the ice opening and slamming closed right under you."

"Oh, I don't figure we'd have to take much risk," Cluny drawled.

"You expect me to bring out the 'copter again, with what that costs?"

"Neu-u-u-u-u," Cluny muttered. "But it might not hurt none to tell Grizzly that we aim to. Truth is, I figure he'll go bring that corpse right to us."

"You getting addled?" Waring exploded. "He was cool as a snow when he reported her disappearance. He's not going to spook."

"But that was back in Anchorage," Cluny pointed out. "Now you're out in grizzly country, marshal, and grizzlies are the most curious and worrying beast there is. If something's going on they can't figure all about, they fret themselves into a lather."

"Well, what's going on that would have him worried?"

"We are," Cluny grunted. "You don't think he ain't been glued to his big 'scope all day watching us? There's no gold on this mountain, and no sheep over here right now. It's not hunting season anyway, and there's no power or pipeline or highway going through to survey. You can bet he knows why we're here and it's got him sweating."

Waring said dryly, "He better be—after the sweating you've given me!"

Cluny chuckled. He said, "You know what a real grizzly would do if we were wolves and got to nosing around his hideout caches?"

"No, I don't know!" Waring growled. "I'm no damned grizzly."

"Well, old Mr. Grizzly would think, 'I'll just go in dig me up that piece of meat and hide it somewhere else where them smart aleck wolves can't find it.' And I figure that's just about what Grizzly Bill is going to do."

The marshal tried another cigarette, almost coughed his lungs out, and finally went sourdough and took a chew of Cluny's plug.

He was no *cheechako,* no greenhorn to Alaska. He could hold his own with Eskimos or miner sourdoughs. But the minds of these bush hunters were devious and mysterious as something from Mars.

He pinned his deputy with a glitter in his eye. "There's just one thing I want to know right now," he growled. "What good did it do to climb way up here?"

"Well, one thing, we spotted the breathing crevasses. You can't see 'em good from his side the glacier. His hill's too straight above them to pick out fast movement. And we got Grizzly Bill worried about what in hell we are up to. If he knew for sure, like after we've seen him, then he'd stop worrying and go into action."

"You sure go to pains to fret a man!" Waring grunted dryly. "Now if you're through playing games, lets get down out of here before our blood freezes."

They started down, which would seem easier than climbing up. It was. It was so easy that a man could step into a hundred yard dive just by the wrong tilt of his body. All the way up, the marshal had pulled himself, and now all the way down, he had to hold himself back. The only part of that day he would ever remember with any kindliness was the hot bath and steak they got back at Tazlina Lodge, about sixty miles down the highway.

They slogged from the highway up to Grizzly Bill's next morning. They reached the cabin early enough, but there was no sign of Grizzly. No sound of his ax came from the timber, no throb of his outboard from the lake.

The marshal was sore and stiff from yesterday's climb and in a caustic mood because of it. He cut professional sign on several items around the place. From the front wind break, he could look straight at the promontory they had visited yesterday. A high powered 'scope that stood in the recess was sign enough that Grizzly had probably watched them.

The oil cook stove in the cabin and the half-filled coffee pot were both completely cold. Apparently Grizzly had checked out plenty early. He had jerked blankets out of his bedding and the disarray of tins and jerky on a table was an almost sure indication that he'd made pack. His bear rifle and his .16-gauge shotgun were both gone.

"Saw us and flew the coop!" Waring rasped. "That was a damn fool trick, giving him warning like that climb yesterday!"

"Get yourself a fishing rig and simmer down," Cluny advised. "He'll be back."

He found poles and a pair of oars and led the way to a rowboat by a decrepit wharf. Grizzly Bill had taken the outboard, so he was somewhere down the lake that wound around the hill.

The marshal had damnably good luck from the first drop of his lure. Damnably, because he was in no mood to enjoy it. When he caught himself snared with the fisherman's spell, he got into an even more foul temper for it.

Waring felt sure that Grizzly had lighted out for some back trail where he might have another cabin, or had hit for the lowlands where he kept his car. He could drive up the Denali highway and hole up for months with some trapper friend if he felt minded to dodge being questioned again by the marshal.

Cluny kept them out fishing until the sun had circled behind the hills and the mosquitoes and "no-see-'ems" were coming in clouds from the dwarfed and scrubby conifers that lined the lake. Lord knew what fed their roots in the rotten shale that passed for dirt at this altitude. The shrubs must have learned to live on minerals.

"Hell, Grizzly will be holed up under Mt. McKinley or over in the Yukon by now!" Waring grumbled as Tim Cluny started pulling into shore.

"He'll be along soon enough," Cluny grunted unperturbably. "You got some sweet steelheads there, marshal. Forget Grizzly and enjoy 'em."

Cluny made himself free with Grizzly Bill's cookstove. He lighted all of his pressure lamps, sending shafts of blazing light out into the blue-purple dusk that would hang for hours. "Wait 'till he spots the way we're wasting his gasoline!" he chuckled.

He wasn't wrong. Within an hour they heard the outboard motor. Shortly, Grizzly Bill filled the doorway, scowling, but restrained by suspicious caution. He was enormous of size, and shaped startlingly like an actual grizzly.

"The law got special privilege to burn up all of a man's fuel?" he barked.

Cluny said, "Get the bark off your back and fetch your supper from the spring barrel. I know damn well you didn't catch any fish today."

"Any day I can't outfish you—" Grizzly roiled.

"You didn't have no fishing rig with you," Cluny laughed. He jabbed his head toward a bottle he'd brought up. "Have a little Jim Beam. That's fair trade for your damned gasoline."

Grizzly Bill picked up the bottle but he still growled, "That fuel don't walk up here by itself! What in hell you need so many lights for?"

"Look," Cluny grunted. "You're going to carry on that way, we'll have the 'copter drop off a drum of blue-gas when it comes out."

Grizzly broke out of a deep and gurgling drink. He looked hard at Cluny, and then looked at the marshal. "What's the 'copter coming out here for?" he demanded.

Cluny took the bottle from Grizzly's bearlike paw. "We're still searching for your wife, man. The ground was hard when she disappeared. She might have sprained a leg or got hung up crossing the muskeg in the bottoms and been trapped on an island by breakup. She's lived in the bush enough to survive, so she might still be alive."

"You crazy?" Grizzly flared. "Don't you think I've looked?"

"Don't cost you nothing for the state to look some more," Cluny grunted.

Grizzly slopped too much grease into the pan and it blazed up, singeing his wiry beard. He cursed and then growled, "When's the 'copter coming out?"

"Next week. Tuesday, weather permitting," Cluny told him. "You got plenty of gas to last to then."

Grizzly ate in concentrated silence, snapping probing glances at the marshal and his deputy. Cluny got out a second bottle of Jim Beam and the marshal tried to bait Grizzly into talk of his vanished wife without success.

He said precisely what he'd said last May. She was there in the morning when he went down the lake, and she wasn't there any more when he got back. She'd worn her heavy parka and taken a hatchet and the 30.06. He'd called and hunted and slogged down trail to the highway and found no sign of her. He'd searched the lake, which was shallow, and there wasn't a chance she'd fallen in and sank.

"How about the crevasses?" Cluny asked casually.

Grizzly stared at him. "Why would she go out there?"

"Maybe to get a chunk of ice," Cluny grunted. "That old blue ice is mighty sweet tasting."

Grizzly chewed at his lips and pawed his jaw. "That woman was so crazy she mighta done anything," he growled. "But I don't figure she was crazy enough to go walking on that glacier."

It was growing daylight when they hit the sack. It was ten next morning before they were having breakfast. They ate hearty, sacked their fish in a nest of lichens, and headed back down the trail.

Grizzly Bill followed them to the edge of the shelf and stood watching. He was scowling and raking his big fingers across his massive neck the last time Cluny looked back. Cluny grinned. Grizzly was plenty worried. Nothing could have been more obvious and it called for no guess work.

"What in hell did you tell him a 'copter was coming out for?" Waring demanded out of earshot. "It isn't, but you put him on guard! I couldn't crack a word out of him after that."

"Shucks, he wouldn't have talked anyway," Cluny said. "But now he'll be worried stiff. You

think you can climb that hill again? The other one?"

"Good grief, why a second time?" Waring barked.

"Why, to see what Grizzly does now," Cluny grunted.

They reached their car, drove back five miles down the highway, and Cluny made camp packs of their sleeping bags. "Trouble with you, marshal, you just don't know grizzlies," Cluny said. "I've knowed grizzlies to go back where they'd covered something up when they weren't even hungry, just to see if it was still there."

"What good's that going to do us?" the lawman demanded gruffly.

"Well, we're dealing with a man half grizzly. Anyway, it don't cost us anything to find out."

He found a trail where there was no trail, carrying them through a muskeg slough, and then up the steep hill they had climbed two days ago, but this time by a more tortuous route, hidden behind a ridge. He located a ledge where the marshal could not see; a ledge about opposite the promontory and made camp. He'd brought binoculars this time. He set up a little screen of stones and shale on the crest of the ridge and sprawled out comfortably to watch Grizzly Bill's shelf.

It was clear that their visit had the giant worried. He moved restlessly around the neighborhood of the cabin all the rest of the day. From time to time he'd sweep the promontory and the front trail with his 'scope. A half dozen times, he walked down to the edge of the glacier and stood there staring.

The marshal watched the proceedings sourly. He growled, "He's not going to risk going out into that crevasse field in this weather. And if he does, what about it? If those crevasses are opening and closing, how are we going to find the right one, except for luck, even if we see him visit it from here?"

"There you go again," Cluny grunted without offense. "It's just on account of you don't know grizzlies, marshal."

The marshal fumed. He fumed harder when nothing of consequence happened by sundown. One thing he was sure of, Grizzly wouldn't risk that glacier in the dark!

Grizzly Bill was down at the edge, though, not long after daylight. He scanned the slopes on their side of the glacier half a dozen times. Finally, he went back to his cabin and came out wearing a winter parka. He carried a rope and climber's pick. He sprawled out by the edge of the ice bridge and scarcely moved to mid-morning.

Suddenly, he straightened, cutting some sign Tim Cluny could not catch from where he was. He jumped his enormous body erect with amazing spryness. A moment

later he was hustling across the icebridge with his rope and pick. He passed through some low-pressure ridges, indistinguishable to the marshal, except that he kept appearing and disappearing against the field of gleaming white.

Finally he appeared very clearly and stopped and dropped his rope and hunkered at a particular spot. The marshal's heart began to beat with the hard rhythm of excitement every law dog feels when a difficult chase shows signs of closing. But Grizzly did nothing after that. He just hunkered there like a man at a fishole in the ice.

Cluny said, "Guess we can go back now, marshal."

Waring stared at him. "Nothing's happened!"

"Oh, something will happen by the time we get there," Cluny grunted, with firm assurance, "Grizzly's a pretty good man in the bush. He knows that glacier. But nothing this side of hell would get *me* out there!"

With his leg muscles and back feeling like he'd been wracked, the marshal followed Cluny down to the highway. He was convinced that leaving their vantage point was a big mistake. Grizzly might be up to nothing more suspicious than chopping a chunk of the particularly hard blue ice the sourdoughs rated so highly in this weather. If Grizzly was up to something grimmer, they might lose the evidence they could have gotten with the marshal's telescopic camera. But Cluny apparently had something in his mind, and this being wilderness bush, it was really his show.

They drove back up the road to the other trail, and made the stiff climb back to Grizzly's. He wasn't around the cabin, so he was probably still out on the glacier. Cluny led the way across the ice bridge and through the pressure ridge. They came out onto clear surface two hundred yards below Grizzly just as he hauled something heavy out of the maw of the blue white ice.

What he hauled up was thickly frosted, but it was recognizable enough to be grim. The marshal drew his automatic as Grizzly turned, with the rope across his shoulder, ready to haul something back across the glacier.

The giant froze, watching them solidly as they came toward him. He slacked on the rope and started to shift his weight from one foot to the other, exactly like a bear.

"You boys got me to thinking maybe she did come out here so I come to take a look. She's kept good enough for decent burying, but her head got kind of bashed when she fell in."

"We can prove that in the laboratory fast enough," Waring said grimly.

"You can?" Grizzly asked with surprise. "You mean you can tell

how her head got so kind of dented?"

The marshal nodded, but Grizzly's thoughts didn't seem to be on his answer. He glanced up at the sun and then his eyes sought some telltale bit of shadow somewhere. Suddenly he gave a snarling laugh and kicked back with right boot, hurtling his wife's corpse back into the crevasse. His wild laugh rose to a roar of humor.

But he had put down his foot in a coil of the rope and now it caught and jerked him flat. He clawed, but there was nothing to claw into on ice that had slicked with the many melts and refreezings of August. Roaring invective, he was dragged back into the crevasse himself.

The two men ran forward to the rim. The crevasse was not deep and it bellied out into a cavern not far below the surface. Grizzly Bill sprawled down there atop the grim evidence of the murder he had committed. One of his legs had a crooked look, as if broken. His roar had changed to a roar of sheer brute anger.

He was still roaring as the ice under their feet quivered and Cluny shoved the marshal back. The crevasse closed in front of them with a *whoosh* of disgorged air and a huge shower of ice particles.

Cluny looked at the position of the sun. He said, "I don't figure it will open up again today. He'll be froze stiff as a seal carcass by tomorrow. He musta knowed how long that crack stays open."

The marshal looked at Cluny with grudging respect. "You had him figured to do just this."

Cluny nodded. "If he had her buried out here. Just like a damned grizzly, marshal. And hell, that wild giant was just about half bear."

Humor twinkled in the marshal's eyes. He nodded at their feet. "Thought nothing this side of hell would get you out on a glacier in August, Cluny?"

"No sirree, nothing on earth would, marshal! But I just kind of got took with curiosity to see what one of these breathing cracks looks like."

"Curious. Like a bear," Waring grinned, but he said it to himself.

THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month

PATTERN for

THE NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

by Brett Halliday

The murder evidence made the police very happy, for it all pointed strongly in one direction. But the redhead knew that there's many a slip on Gallow's Highway.

WHEN MICHAEL SHAYNE entered his Flagler Street office at nine fifteen A.M., there were two people waiting in chairs. The man was about forty, tall and good-looking in a theatrical sort of way, his dark hair worn a trifle long and his sideburns a bit thicker than most men wore them.

The woman, about five years younger, was a handsome platinum blonde with a remarkably youthful figure for her apparent age. There was something about her, too, possibly the way she wore her makeup, which made the detective think of show business.

They both looked at the detective expectantly as he hung his hat on the clothes tree near the door.

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a CRIME

Giving them a polite nod, he crossed to his private office, motioning Lucy Hamilton, who was seated at her typewriter beyond the wooden railing, to follow him as he went by her.

In the inner office Shayne seated himself behind his bare-topped desk and gave his secretary an inquiring look as she closed the door behind her.

"Don't you recognize them, Michael?" Lucy asked.

He shook his head. "Should I, angel?"

"They're television personalities, Michael. *Breakfast with the Coles*. They're on from seven until eight every morning."

"Oh, that!" Shayne said. "I've heard of it. A lot of sickeningly coy conversation over the breakfast table! I don't get up that early."

"You should," Lucy said. "They're really not bad. They have quite a local following among housewives."

"I'm not a housewife," the redhead growled. "What do they want?"

"They wouldn't tell me, but one or both must be in some kind of danger. They asked if you ever hired out as a bodyguard."

Shayne frowned. "You told them no?"

Lucy nodded. "They still want to see you, though. They obviously don't want to tell me what it's all about, so you'll have to get it out of them."

"Okay," the redhead said. "Send them in."

Lucy went out and a moment later the couple entered. Shayne rose to greet them, motioned them to chairs and reseated himself.

"Now which one of you is in danger?" he inquired.

Both looked surprised. The man asked, "How did you know one of us was in danger?"

Shayne said dryly, "You asked my secretary if I hired out as a bodyguard. It wasn't much of a deduction."

The woman said in a husky voice, "I'm the one who was threatened."

"Oh? When did you receive this threat?"

"Five years ago yesterday."

Shayne hiked shaggy eyebrows. With a thumb and forefinger he tugged at his left earlobe. "Maybe you'd better begin at the beginning," he suggested.

Nervously she fumbled a silver cigarette case from her handbag. Her husband solicitously held the flame of a lighter to her cigarette. Snapping the lighter shut and dropping it into a pocket, he said in a rather precise, stage-manner voice, "It will take Marie forever to tell the story, Mr. Shayne. She's so upset, she hardly knows what she's doing. Her former husband was released from prison yesterday."

Shayne gave a thoughtful nod. "I'm beginning to get it. The threat was five years ago, but until now

he hasn't been free to carry it out. Is that it?"

"That's right. He drew five to ten for aggravated assault with intent to kill. They hit him with the book because it was a second offense. He left Marie's brother a permanent cripple."

"Sounds like a pleasant character," the redhead said. "What's his name?"

Marie Cole managed to say in a strained voice, "Barry Trimble."

Shayne's eyebrows went up again. "The ex-fighter? I remember that case."

"Then you can readily understand why my wife is worried," Cole said. "Barry has an insane temper and he never forgets a grudge. I know. I grew up with him and I owned a piece of him when he was fighting professionally. That investment blew up in my face. He was barred from the ring after his first conviction for assault. He put a reporter in the hospital for writing that he was a dirty fighter."

Shayne asked, "Why did he threaten you when he was sent away, Mrs. Cole?"

Her husband answered for her. "It was Marie who had him arrested for beating up her brother. She brought a divorce action before he came to trial and got her decree the day before he was sentenced. He told her right after the sentencing, just before they led him away, that he was going to kill her when he got out."

Shayne pursed his lips. "Convicted felons often make threats," he said. "He's had five years to simmer down. What makes you think he still holds a grudge strong enough to make him carry out the threat?"

The platinum blonde whispered, "I know Barry. He never forgets."

"Barry wouldn't forget a resentment like that in fifty years," Cole concurred. "I know him even better than Marie does."

"Have you heard from him while he was in prison?" Shayne asked the woman. "Has he ever renewed the threat?"

She shook her head. "Barry's not a letter writer. But that doesn't mean anything. I *know* he's been sitting in his cell letting the wound fester for five years. I *know* he still means to kill me."

Shayne looked thoughtfully from one to the other. "How long have you two been married?" he inquired.

The blonde said, "Norbert and I were married four years ago, Mr. Shayne. About a year after Harry went to prison."

Shayne gave his earlobe another tug. "Has it occurred to you that he might have a grudge against you too, Mr. Cole?"

"For marrying Marie?" He shrugged. "I've thought of it. Barry and I were pretty close once, and

he might consider it a betrayal of friendship. On the other hand, Barry isn't a jealous man. He's just vindictive. Marie rather doubts that he ever really loved her. He was more angry at her for having him arrested than for divorcing him."

After a thoughtful pause, Shayne asked, "What do you expect me to do about this? As my secretary told you, I don't hire out as a bodyguard. Seems to me you ought to ask for police protection."

The platinum blonde said quickly, "Oh, we couldn't go to the police, Mr. Shayne. It would all be in the papers again. And we can't stand any bad publicity at this point."

"Why not?"

"Don't you watch daytime television?" Cole asked.

"I'm too busy during the day," Shayne said dryly.

The man looked a trifle hurt. "Marie and I have a daily program called *Breakfast with the Coles.* It's a conversation thing where we sit around the breakfast table and discuss current events, local news and what department store sales are going on in Miami. The stores sponsor us, you see."

"I knew who you were," Shayne said. "But I don't see the connection with not wanting the police in on it."

"We're supposed to be a normal, happily married couple," Cole explained. "Having it spread all over the papers that an ex-convict former husband is out to kill Marie would destroy our public image. The public isn't even aware that she was married once before. Since our contract renewal comes up in two weeks, we simply can't afford that kind of publicity."

The redhead grunted. "I still don't see what I can do for you."

"We hoped you'd agree to act as my bodyguard for a time," Marie Cole said. "But if you won't do that, perhaps you could at least see Barry and discourage any violent intentions he has."

"What makes you think I could discourage him?" Shayne asked curiously.

"Well, you have the reputation of being a rather—ah—bad man to cross. Perhaps if Barry knew I was under your protection, he'd at least think twice before attempting anything."

Shayne said dubiously, "If he actually plans to kill you for the motive you say, he must be insane. You can seldom deter insane people from revenge with threats, because they seldom worry about consequences. I'd be willing to see him in order to form an opinion about just how serious his intentions are. But I won't guarantee that I can discourage any homicidal plans he has. Where do I find him?"

"Oh, we have no idea where he is," Marie Cole said.

The redhead looked at her.

"All we know is that he was re-

leased yesterday," Cole said. "We knew his release was pending, and we've been worried about it. I phoned the prison office and learned that he had been released as scheduled. However, when I wouldn't give my name, they refused to give me his address."

"Why wouldn't you give your name?" Shayne asked.

Cole looked a little embarrassed. "Probably I was being over-cautious. But we're so concerned about the possibility of publicity, I didn't want even the prison officials to know there was any connection between *Breakfast with the Coles* and Barry Trimble."

Shayne grunted. After reflecting for a moment, he said, "I can probably locate him if he's in the Miami area. I'm willing to look him up for a talk and then give you my opinion of what you should do. That's the best service I can offer you."

"We appreciate you taking even that much action," the blonde said fervently. "Frankly, Mr. Shayne, I'm badly frightened."

"Where can I reach you?" Shayne asked.

Cole gave an address and phone number in South Miami. Lifting a small scratch pad from a desk drawer, Shayne jotted the information down, tore off the sheet and thrust it into a pocket. He dropped the pad back into the drawer.

"I'll try to have a report for you by this evening," he said, rising

from his chair in indication that the interview was over.

The couple rose too. The woman said, "If you phone when we're not there, you can leave a message with my brother Harlan, Mr. Shayne. He lives with us and he's always home."

"He can't go out," Cole amplified. "He's confined to a wheelchair. Paralyzed from the waist down. That's why Barry drew such a stiff sentence. He broke his back."

Shayne accompanied them to the door, watched as they crossed the outer office and left. Then he said to Lucy, "Get me Will Gentry on the phone, will you, angel?"

A few moments later the inner office phone buzzed and Lucy informed Shayne that Police Chief Will Gentry was on the phone.

Shayne said, "How are you, Will?"

"Fine," the chief said cordially. "What's up, Mike?"

"I need a little information. A five-to-ten felon was released from the state penitentiary yesterday after serving five. Probably it was an unconditional release, inasmuch as he served the full lesser term, but it may be just a parole. He went in from here, so you'd automatically be informed of his outside address, wouldn't you?"

Gentry said, "If he returned to Miami, we'd automatically get it even if he isn't on parole. What's his name?"

"Barry Trimble."

"The ex-fighter?" Gentry asked in a surprised tone. "I remember that case. He made a cripple out of some guy. Just a minute, Mike."

The chief was gone from the phone about two minutes. When he returned, he said, "It was an unconditional release, Mike. He's not on parole. But he returned to Miami, so they sent us his local address. Ready?"

Shayne poised a pen over his scratch pad. "Shoot. It's what I need most right now."

Gentry reeled off the address of a rooming house on South Portage, and the redhead wrote it down.

"Thanks," Shayne said. "See you, Will."

"Wait a minute, Mike. What do you want with Trimble?",

"Just a welfare report, Will. An old friend wants to know what his prospects for the future are."

"Oh. Well, you can let us know if you think he's a problem case. We're interested in knowing how ex-cons get along too."

"Sure, Will," the redhead said, and hung up.

He left the office, telling Lucy not to expect him back until after lunch.

II

MIKE SHAYNE'S FIRST stop was at the office of the *Miami Daily News,* where he got his reporter friend, Timothy Rourke, to dig out of the newspaper morgue both the story of Barry Trimble's assault on a reporter and the later assault for which he had drawn his prison term. In both cases it seemed the man had been so drunk he didn't know what he was doing.

In the latter case Marie Cole's brother, whose name was given as Harlan Wright, apparently had been drunk also and couldn't recall what had happened beyond a vague recollection of having an argument with his brother-in-law. He had fallen down a flight of stairs, fracturing his spine. The only witness was Trimble's wife, who testified that Trimble had knocked her brother down the stairs in a drunken rage.

From the newspaper office Shayne headed for the rooming house on South Portage. He arrived about eleven thirty A.M.

The place was a two-story frame building badly in need of paint. A dim hall contained a double

bank of mail slots with cards beneath them. A brand new card beneath slot number 212 had *Barry Trimble* inked on it.

Shayne climbed carpeted stairs to the second floor, located 212 halfway down the hall. His rap brought a burly, cheerful-faced man in his late thirties to the door. The man had a somewhat battered face and one cauliflower ear, but nevertheless there was something pleasant about his appearance. Years back Shayne had seen him in the ring a time or two and had liked his roughhouse style. Today, after reading the news accounts of the brutal beatings he had given two men, he had been prepared to dislike him on sight. But the ex-fighter gave him such a disarmingly friendly grin, he found himself instinctively smiling back.

"Barry Trimble?" the redhead asked.

"Uh-huh. What can I do for you?"

"I'm Mike Shayne," the detective said. "Like to talk to you."

"The private detective?" Trimble asked with pleased surprise. "I've heard a lot about you. Come on in." Hospitably he held the door wide.

Shayne walked into a bare room furnished with an ancient double bed, a single dresser with a marble top and one straight-backed chair. In lieu of a private bath there was a grease-ringed washbowl in one corner.

"Have a seat," Trimble invited, pointing to the lone chair. He seated himself on the edge of the bed and looked at Shayne expectantly.

Shayne took the proffered chair, brought out cigarettes and offered one. Trimble accepted it, allowed the redhead to hold a match to it, then leaned back and took an appreciative puff.

After lighting his own and reaching to drop the match into a dresser-top ash tray, Shayne said, "Understand you just got out of the big place yesterday, Barry."

"Uh-huh," the man said with cheerful lack of embarrassment.

"What are your plans?"

"Why?" Trimble inquired curiously. "Got a job lined up for me?"

Shayne shook his head. "Just making a welfare investigation. Somebody's worried about you."

"No fooling?" the ex-fighter said in surprise. "I didn't think I had a friend left in the world. I didn't get a single letter my last three years in the joint."

There was no resentment in his tone. It was merely a statement of fact. Despite the man's record of brutality, Shayne couldn't help beginning to feel a liking for him.

He said casually, "Your ex-wife wonders if you're still as sore as you were five years ago."

Trimble's cheerful expression evaporated. But he didn't look angry. He merely looked reproachful, as though the redhead had disappointed him in some way.

"I always heard you were a right guy, Shayne," he said in a wounded voice. "Don't tell me you're working for that witch."

"Just to make a welfare investigation," Shayne said mildly.

"Welfare investigation, hell," Trimble said with a touch of bitterness. "She wouldn't care if I starved in the gutter. Why'd she really sick you onto me? Because she's scared that I'll wring her rotten neck?"

"She's a little upset by that possibility," the detective admitted in the same mild tone. "She says that five years ago you promised to kill her. Still plan on it?"

Trimble's good humor returned. Reaching out to crush his cigarette in the dresser ash tray, he chortled. "Losing some sleep, is she? I never said I'd kill her, Shayne. I said I'd wring her neck."

"That often kills people," Shayne said dryly. "Still plan to do it?"

The man made a gesture of amused impatience. "I never planned to kill her. It was just one of those things you say when you're mad. It didn't mean anything. I'd dance at her funeral, but I wouldn't walk across the street to bat her one. I hope I never see her again." He grinned widely. "No fooling, is she having nightmares?"

"A few." Shayne examined him contemplatively. "Is this straight? You're holding no grudge?"

"Sure I'm holding a grudge," Trimble said. "I hate her guts. But I'm not going to the electric chair for the privilege of getting even. She railroaded me into five years. That's enough."

"Railroaded you?" Shayne said. "You made her brother a cripple."

"Sure," the ex-fighter admitted with a regretful frown. "When we were both so drunk neither of us remembered the fight. You don't think I meant to cripple him, do you?"

"That's beside the point. You did."

"Listen," Trimble said earnestly. "For five years I've regretted what I did to Harlan. Not just because it got me a sentence, but because I wouldn't deliberately do that to anybody. But I never regretted choosing him that night. He'd been sponging on me since the day I married his sister. He lived with us, you know, and he never worked a day in his life.

"On top of that he rode me all the time about being a punch-drunk fighter. He deserved to have me clobber him. I don't know just what happened, because we were both drunker than skunks. But it must have been an accident that he fell down the stairs. Marie could have said it was an accident. She was the only witness. But she testified that I picked him up and heaved him down the stairs. She didn't have to say that."

"You mean she could have lied to save you?"

"She could at least have shut up," he said. "The law says a wife can't be forced to testify against her husband. It doesn't say she can't, if she hates him enough to want to. They couldn't have touched me without her testimony. But she got on the stand and deliberately sent me up."

"Maybe she had some regard for her brother," Shayne said.

"She hasn't any regard for anyone but herself," Trimble said cynically. "But why rehash things that are over and done with? Tell her to rest easy. I'm staying on the wagon."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

Trimble hiked thick eyebrows. "Don't you know how I am? I'm a Jekyll and Hyde drinker. Sober, I'm a pretty nice guy, even if I do say so myself. Drunk I'm a slob. I *might* look her up and bat her around if I got drunk. I might do almost anything. But I've already spent five years behind bars for getting drunk. You couldn't pay me ever to take another drink."

Shayne looked him up and down. "Think you can stick to that resolution? When you've been hitting the bottle for a long time—"

"I'm certain of it," the man said in a definite tone. "I'll never take another drink as long as I live. You can assure Marie of that. And tell Norbert to rest easy too. I haven't got any grudge against him. All he has is my sympathy."

"Oh, you know she's remarried then?"

"Sure. We got the Miami papers in stir." Suddenly he grinned. "I thought about sending them a wedding present, but I couldn't get hold of the materials to build a bomb." He shrugged and the grin was gone.

Shayne rose and killed his cigarette in the ash tray. "Okay, Trimble. I'll report to my client that you're willing to let bygones be bygones. Need a job?"

"I start as dish washer in a joint up the street today," Trimble said. "I could use a better one."

"I'll speak to a couple of business acquainances," Shayne said.

"Maybe I can turn you up something."

"I'd certainly appreciate that," the man said, rising also. He glanced at a wrist watch. "Hey, I've got to report to work at noon. I'll walk down with you."

They went down the stairs together. Outside Trimble pointed to a sign up the street which read: SWARTZ'S CAFE.

"It only pays a dollar an hour," he said. "But I get three meals, so it's enough to tide me over. The food isn't too hot, but at least the place is clean."

They talked for a moment or two more, then Trimble walked up the street and entered the restaurant. Shayne climbed into his car and drove away.

III

SHAYNE STOPPED FOR lunch before driving to South Miami, so it was nearly two P.M. when he arrived at the home of Norbert and Marie Cole. It was a neat, two-story stucco building with a spacious lawn studded with palm trees.

When he rang the bell, a masculine voice from the front room called, "Come on in." A television indoors was blasting so loudly, he barely heard the invitation over it

Opening the door, the redhead stepped into a wide front room comfortably furnished with good quality furniture. Opposite the front door stairs led to the second floor. Just left of the stairs a blond, sullen-faced man of about thirty sat in a wheelchair with a shawl over his legs, facing a television screen.

A quizz program was on, and just as Shayne entered, the idiot M.C. emitted a hyena laugh at some joke he had just made. Shayne winced, partly at the volume but mostly at the M.C.

The man in the wheelchair lifted a small remote-control box from his lap, aimed it at the television set and pushed a button. The sound died and the screen went blank.

"I agree with your expression," he said sardonically. "The worst loss to show business when vaudeville died was the hook they used to use to jerk lousy performers offstage. But I have to watch it because there isn't anything else to do. You must be Mike Shayne."

"Uh-huh," Shayne said. "And you must be Mrs. Cole's brother."

The man in the wheelchair nodded. "Harlan Wright. If you're looking for my sister and brother-in-law, they should be back any minute. They ran over to pick up Lydia Mason. She's the writer responsible for the corn they inflict on the long-suffering public every morning. They meet here every afternoon to plan the next day's horror session. Today Lydia phoned that her car broke down, so they had to go after her. Have a seat."

Crossing the room, Shayne dropped his lanky frame into a chair and produced cigarettes. He gave Harlan Wright an inquiring look.

"No thanks," the man said. "I don't smoke. There's a ash stand right behind you. Did you locate Trimble?"

Shayne nodded. Lighting a cigarette with a paper match, he twisted in his chair to move the ash stand behind it around in front of him. He dropped the dead match into it.

"How is my punchy ex-brother-in-law?" Wright asked.

"Seems in good spirits," Shayne said laconically.

The man chuckled without humor. "So my lovely sister is worried that Barry will come after her, is she? He ought to. If ever a bitch deserved a clobbering, Marie does."

Shayne hiked shaggy eyebrows.

"She railroaded the poor slob," Wright said. "It was the easiest way to get rid of him. She had her greedy little eyes on Norbert." He chuckled again. "Then she almost didn't land Norbert after going to all the trouble of getting rid of Barry. It took her a full year to sink her hooks into him."

Shayne said with a frown, "You mean Trimble's conviction was a frame?"

"Oh, we had some kind of a scrap, all right. I vaguely remember clobbering him and getting clobbered back. But I've always doubted that he deliberately threw me down the stairs. I wouldn't put it past Marie to have pushed me herself. She would have liked to be rid of me, too." He emitted another cynical chuckle. "If she did, it sure backfired. Now she's stuck with my support for life."

Shayne took a thoughtful puff on his cigarette. "You don't seem to harbor much resentment against Trimble."

Wright shrugged. "I'm not sure he did this to me. And even if he did, it wasn't on purpose. Aside from being dumb, Barry isn't a bad guy when he's sober."

The front door opened and Marie Cole entered. Behind her came a slim brunette, of about thirty and behind the brunette was Norbert Cole. The brunette had a nice figure, but a rather plain face at first glance. At second glance you noted her ripe lips and sultry expression and realized that even if she lacked photogenic beauty, there was a definite feminine allure about her.

Killing his cigarette, Shayne rose to his feet.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Shayne," Marie Cole said. "You've met my brother, I see." She introduced the brunette as Lydia Mason, adding the information that the woman was the staff writer for *Breakfast with the Coles*.

Shayne gave Lydia a polite nod and the woman murmured, "How

do you do?" She crossed to seat herself in the chair nearest the detective.

Marie Cole seated herself on the sofa. After closing the door behind him, Norbert Cole seated himself next to his wife and waved Shayne back to his chair.

Harlan Wright said, "Mr. Shayne located Barry, Marie. He's coming over tonight to cut your ears off."

The platinum blonde's eyes widened. Shayne growled, "Your brother has a misplaced sense of humor, Mrs. Cole." He threw a glance at Lydia Mason.

Norbert Cole said, "You can make any report you have in front of Lydia, Mr. Shayne. She's like one of the family."

The redhead shrugged. "All right, then, Mrs. Cole, your ex-husband is living in a rooming house at South Portage and Labat. He has a dishwashing job at *Schwartz's Cafe,* a few door from the rooming house. He isn't interested in any revenge. He said to tell you he plans to stay on the wagon."

"Barry stay on the wagon?" she said unbelievingly.

Norbert Cole said, "If he does, there isn't much to worry about. It's only when he's drunk that he goes nuts."

Shayne said, "He admitted being a Jekyll and Hyde drinker. He blames drink for what happened and doesn't want a repeat. I'm inclined to believe he really means to stay away from the stuff, though of course I can't guarantee that he will. But my opinion after talking to him is that you aren't in any danger from him so long as he stays sober."

"He was sober when he threatened to kill me five years ago," she said dubiously.

"He insists it wasn't meant as a threat. He says when he promised to wring your neck, it was just an angry remark. He has no intention of coming anywhere near you."

"How's he feel about me?" Cole asked.

Under ordinary circumstances Shayne wouldn't have repeated Trimble's exact words in order to shield his ex-wife's feelings. But his opinion of Marie Cole had been steadily dropping ever since he first met her and he was beginning to doubt that she had any feelings other than concern for her own skin.

He said dryly, "He's holding no grudge against you for marrying Marie. He said all you have is his sympathy."

The woman flushed. Harlan Wright chuckled delightedly and she threw him a baleful glare. Norbert Cole and Lydia Mason discreetly showed no reactions at all.

Shayne rose to his feet. "I guess that about winds it up, Mrs. Cole. If you don't think he's capable of staying on the wagon, I suggest

you lock your doors at night and stay off the streets when you're alone for a time. If he does stay sober, I don't think you have to worry."

"How will I know whether or not he's sticking to his resolution?" she inquired dissatisfiedly.

The redhead shrugged. "You have a problem. As things stand, you don't even have much grounds to ask for a police guard, unless he does get drunk and tries to commit some overt act. About all you can do is be careful and hope he stays on the wagon."

"Couldn't you make a periodic check on him?"

Shayne shook his head. "I'm not a nursemaid, Mrs. Cole. I agreed to see him once and give you my opinion. If you want a regular check kept on him, you'll have to hire some other investigator. It isn't the sort of case that interests me in the least."

"Well, could I at least call on you if he threatens me again?"

"If he does that," Shayne agreed. "Phone me any time if you think you're in real danger, and I'll come running."

Norbert Cole rose to show the redhead to the door. "That ought to be satisfactory, Marie," he said. "With Mr. Shayne on tap for emergencies, there isn't anything to worry about. We certainly appreciate what you've done, Mr. Shayne. Don't we, Marie?"

"I guess," his wife said without much enthusiasm, still obviously not satisfied with what Shayne had told her.

There was nothing Shayne could do about that. Barry Trimble might go ten years without taking a drink, then fall off the wagon and decide to carry out his threat. It was a situation in which the only permanent solution was hope.

Bidding the Coles goodbye and telling Harlan Wright and Lydia Mason he was glad to have met them, the redhead left.

IV

AT ELEVEN THIRTY that night Shayne was having a cognac and ice water nightcap in his apartment when the phone rang. Setting down his glass, he went to answer it.

"Mike?" a frightened feminine voice said in his ear. "Mr. Shayne, I mean."

"Mike is all right," he growled. "What is it, Marie?"

"Barry just phoned. His voice was so thick with drink, I could hardly understand him. He said he's on his way over here to kill me."

"Is your husband home?" Shayne asked sharply.

"It's his bowling night. No one's here but Harlan, and he's downstairs in bed. I'm phoning from bed too, as a matter of fact. I took Barry's call on my bedside extension. The doors are locked, but both the front and back doors have

glass panes. If he's beserk, he could knock out a pane and reach through to unlock the door."

"Do you know where he phoned from?"

"I haven't any idea. I don't think it was a pay phone, because there wasn't any operator's voice first. Barry was right there when I answered."

"You don't get an operator's voice on pay-phone calls anymore," Shayne said. "They're all dial. It's a fifteen minute drive from here to your place. I want you to call the police and tell them to come fast. I'll get there as soon as I can."

"Oh, Mike, I can't drag the police into this," she wailed. "It will be in the papers."

"You won't need a contract renewal if you're dead," Shayne snapped. "Call them."

"But Mike—" Her voice ended in a gasp as there was a crash of glass far in the background.

Shayne said, "Marie!"

"That was the front door," she whispered.

"Lock your bedroom door," the detective said rapidly. "I'll have the cops there in a matter of minutes. Hang up now, so I can dial."

"All right," she said in a panicky voice, and the phone went dead.

Shayne dialed police headquarters and barked the information to the desk sergeant in quick, staccato words. The call took him less than thirty seconds. Then he slammed down the receiver, grabbed his coat from where it was draped over a chair and shrugged into it on the way to the door.

He headed for South Miami with his accelerator to the floor. At stop lights and stop signs he slowed only enough to make sure there was no cross traffic, then whizzed on through. Where there was cross traffic, he blasted it to a stop with his horn and nosed through as soon as the other cars came to screeching halts.

If he had been driving like that to a party, he thought grimly, cops would be sounding a siren at him before he had gone two blocks. But because he wanted a police car to appear, so that it could clear the rest of the way with its siren, there wasn't one in sight anywhere. It was the way the dice always seemed to fall.

Nevertheless he made the fifteen-minute drive in nine minutes flat, slamming to a halt behind a police radio car parked in front of the stucco home. As he long-legged it across the lawn, he noted that the front door stood wide open and every light in the house was on. The upper glass pane of the door was shattered, he saw as he entered the house, and broken glass was strewn all over the floor just inside.

He found Harlan Wright, pale-faced and tousle-haired, seated in

his wheelchair in the front room. The man was in pajamas.

When Shayne gave him an inquiring look, Wright said huskily, "I don't know what happened. It takes me five minutes to lift myself out of bed into my chair. By the time I got out here, cops were running upstairs. They're still there."

Shayne went up the stairs three at a time. He reached the top just as a uniformed officer came from a bedroom door. Shayne knew the man, whose name was George Gannon.

"Hi, Mike," Gannon said in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"I phoned in the complaint," Shayne growled. "I was talking to Mrs. Cole on the phone when the door pane broke. Is she all right?"

Gannon gave his head a regretful shake. He nodded toward the open bedroom door.

Stepping to the door, Shayne looked in. A second police officer, whom Shayne didn't know, was peering into the bathroom. Marie Cole, wearing a black lace nightgown, lay face up on the bed. Her face was purple and her swollen tongue protruded grotesquely from her open mouth. Her eyes were horribly distended.

"Strangled," George Gannon said, unnecessarily from behind him.

His face trenched with anger, Shayne examined the door lock.

When he turned the key, which was on the inner side, it worked perfectly. There was no sign that the lock had been forced.

"Was this door unlocked when you arrived?" he inquired.

Gannon said, "It was standing wide open."

"He must have made it up the stairs before she could get to it from the bed," Shayne said bitterly. "I told her to lock herself in."

The other policeman said, "Nobody in the bathroom. Let's check the other rooms." He looked at the redhead curiously.

"Mike Shayne," Gannon told him. "You've heard of him."

"Oh, sure," the policeman said. "How are you, Mr. Shayne?"

"Sore," Shayne growled.

As both officers went off to search the rest of the house, the redhead bent over the dead woman. The nail of the ring finger on

each hand was broken, he noted, indicating that she had struggled to tear the throttling grip from her throat. Close examination of the nails failed to show any skin particles or blood beneath them, however, as would have been the case had she managed to scratch her assailant's flesh. Shayne could not be sure, but it seemed highly probable that the killer had worn long sleeves, and possibly gloves.

He moved out into the hall just as Officer Bannon came from another room.

"Nobody up here," Gannon said. "Let's see what Joe found downstairs."

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, the other officer came from the back of the house.

"Nobody but him," he said, jerking a thumb at the man in the wheelchair. "I phoned in a report, so Homicide will be along soon."

He looked at the redhead. "What do you know about this, Mr. Shayne?"

"She was a client of mine," Shayne growled. "You can phone in another report. Get out an APB on Barry Trimble. They can get his description from his card downtown. He was released from prison yesterday."

The officer named Joe hiked his eyebrows. "You think he did it?"

"He phoned my client that he was coming over here to kill her. You can add to the description that he's drunk. If you get it on the air fast, you may still net him in the vicinity."

The policeman headed for an extension phone on a small table next to the stairs.

It was midnight before the homicide team showed up. It consisted of a plump, middle-aged lieutenant named Sam Mosby and a gaunt detective named Allen Buck. They brought a medic and a lab man with them.

The lieutenant did all the questioning, while his gaunt partner took notes. After the medic and lab man went upstairs, Mosby got the stories of the two officers first on the scene, of Harlan Wright and Mike Shayne.

When he had all the essential information, Mosby said, "We've got fifty cops searching the area. If he's still around, we'll get him."

"Send anyone to his home address?" Shayne inquired.

Mosby looked at him. "Naturally. His room door's locked and the manager doesn't have a duplicate key. The place is staked out. If the dragnet doesn't snare him and he doesn't show at home, I'll run over there after while and break the door down. Maybe he's hiding in the closet."

George Gannon came in the front door leading Norbert Cole by the arm. "This guy says he lives here, Lieutenant," he announced. "Says he's the woman's husband."

"What's happened?" Cole inquired, looking from Mosby to

Shayne. There was a sharp anxiety in his stare.

Ignoring the question, Mosby said, "Where you been tonight, mister?"

"It's my bowling night. What's happened? Is my wife all right?"

Harlan Wright said in a harsh voice, "She's dead, Norbert. Barry broke in and strangled her." Then he lowered his face into his hands and suddenly began to sob.

Everyone stared at the weeping man in the wheelchair. The police officers looked vaguely embarrassed at seeing a man in tears. Norbert Cole seemed too stunned by his brother-in-law's announcement to be affected by his sobbing. Shayne's primary reaction was puzzlement at Wright's display of grief over the death of a sister he had obviously disliked.

Wright cleared up his puzzlement by dolefully inquiring through his tears, "Now who's going to take care of me? I'll have to go to some home."

It wasn't grief, the redhead realized, making no attempt to conceal his disgust. It was merely sudden understanding by the cripple that he had lost his only source of support. He seemed to possess the same self-interested philosophy that his sister had.

The medic came down the stairs and said, "Death by strangulation, all right. Within the last hour, I'd guess."

Lieutenant Mosby said, "We've got the time of death pretty well pinpointed, Doc. She talked to Shayne here on the phone at eleven thirty. When the boys arrived seven minutes later, she was already dead."

"Then why'd you call me out of a poker game?" the medic rasped. "Just to tell you she was dead? Any moron could have looked at her and have told that."

He stormed out of the house.

"I'd hate to have his disposition," Mosby said. "Al, see if the dragnet has snared anything."

Silently his gaunt partner crossed to the phone by the stairs and dialed. After a brief conversation, he hung up and shook his head.

"Then I think I'll hit the guy's apartment," Mosby said. "Gannon, you and Joe can come along. You both have door-breaking shoulders. Al, you stay here for the lab report and until the morgue wagon shows up."

Shayne said, "Mind if I trail along, Lieutenant?"

Mosby shrugged. "Suit yourself, Shayne. If he's locked in that room and he's drunk, it may take four of us to subdue him. I've seen Trimble in the ring, and he's strong as a bull."

He strode out the door trailed by the two uniformed policemen. Shayne followed them out, climbed into his car which was parked behind the police car. The two policemen got in the front

seat of the radio car, Lieutenant Mosby got in back.

Shayne kept behind them all the way to South Portage and Labat. It was a fifteen-minute drive, even with the police car's siren open. As Lieutenant Mosby's investigation had taken nearly an hour at the scene of the crime, it was past one A.M. when they got there.

V

THE STAKEOUT CAR in front of the rooming house was an unmarked undercover car with a single plain-clothesman in it. Lieutenant Mosby stopped to have a brief word with him before going inside.

They found the outside man's partner posted in the hallway outside of room 212. He straightened up from a slouching position when he saw the lieutenant.

"I don't think there's anybody in there, Lieutenant," he said. "I've listened at the door a half dozen times, and I can't hear a sound."

"Go get the manager," Mosby ordered.

The man went down the stairs. The lieutenant, Shayne and the two uniformed officers waited as a good five minutes passed. While waiting, Mosby went over to lay his ear against the door, then shrugged and leaned against the wall. Eventually the stakeout man reappeared with a thin, elderly man wearing a robe over pajamas.

"You the manager of this place?" Lieutenant Mosby asked.

"Yes, and this is the second time I've been routed out of bed," the man complained. "What is it this time?"

"What's your name?"

"Henry Fellinger."

"How come you don't have a pass key to all the rooms, Mr. Fellinger?"

Fellinger said in an aggrieved tone, "Like I told this other officer here, I had one, but I lost it last week. You'll just have to wait until Mr. Trimble comes home if you want to get in there."

"I don't think so," Mosby informed him. He turned to his two uniformed companions. "Break it in.

"Hey!" the manager protested. "You can't do that!"

"Watch us," Mosby said. "Go ahead, boys."

George Gannon examined the door, which was held by a spring lock. Then he backed across the hall, charged forward and threw a beefy shoulder against it. The door shuddered but the lock held.

Rubbing his shoulder, Gannon stepped aside as his partner Joe hurled himself against the door. There was the rending sound of screws being torn from wood and the door crashed inward against the inside wall.

Lieutenant Mosby entered the

room, followed by Shayne. The center light was off, but a small light burned over the corner wash-bowl. There was a strong odor of whisky in the room. An empty pint bottle stood on the dresser. A second, also empty, lay on the floor. A wet stain on the rug around it explained the odor. Apparently it had been at least half full when it spilled.

A straight-backed chair lay on its side near the room's center. A section of doubled clothesline was securely tied to the overhead light fixture and hung downward.

Hanging limply from the end of the rope was the body of Barry Trimble.

The men in the hall had now all crowded in behind Mike Shayne. Everyone stared at the dead man.

Henry Fellinger squeaked, "He's dead! He hung himself!"

Swinging toward the rooming-house manager, Lieutenant Mosby snapped, "We won't need you any more, Mr. Fellinger. Go on back to bed."

The man continued to stare open-mouthed at the dead man. George Gannon took his arm and gently steered him from the room. He stood watching from the doorway until he was sure the manager had gone back downstairs, then re-entered the room.

Lieutenant Mosby moodily circled the dangling corpse. "Well, I guess that's that" he said. "Murder and suicide." He glanced at

his watch and his expression turned from a moody look to one of satisfaction. "Both neatly tied up in less than two hours."

Shayne went close to examine the body. Trimble's face was as congested as Marie Cole's had been, his tongue was equally swollen and his eyes were distended. The knot of the noose was expertly placed to the side and slightly to the rear of the man's neck, in the traditional spot that hangmen place it, but it hadn't succeeded in breaking the neck. Trimble had strangled to death, by all appearances.

Mosby said, "He stood on the chair, tied the rope around his neck, then kicked the chair from under him."

Shayne went over to examine the broken door lock. It was a simple spring lock, with no extra bolt which could be thrown from the inside.

The lieutenant asked, "What are you looking at, Shayne?"

"It's too pat," the redhead growled. "It looks rigged."

"Rigged?" Mosby repeated with a frown. "He was locked in."

"It's a spring lock, Lieutenant. All you have to do is pull the door closed from outside."

Mosby's frown deepened. "The guy phoned Mrs. Cole that he was coming over to kill her. You said so yourself. He carried out his threat, then came back here and hanged himself. Why do you want to complicate a simple picture? It all fits."

Shayne irritably tugged at his left earlobe. "*Somebody* phoned her and said he was Trimble. According to Marie, his voice was so thick she could hardly understand him. Thick with drink, she said. But it could merely have been a disguised voice."

"She used to be married to the guy," Mosby said impatiently. "She'd recognize his voice. She'd be certain to."

"She hadn't heard it for five years. And for all we know, she'd never before heard it over the phone when he was drunk. Would you recognize your wife's voice over the phone if she called you, said she was someone else and talked so thickly you could barely make out the words?"

After staring at the redhead for a moment, the lieutenant made a dismissing gesture. "Why would anybody rig a thing like this, Shayne? What would be the motive?"

"I don't know," Shayne admitted. "I just don't like the smell of it."

"Why?"

"I talked to Trimble right here in this room less than fourteen hours ago. He said he was permanently on the wagon. He sounded like he meant it. If a couple of months had passed, or even a couple of weeks, I might swallow it. But it's hard to believe he didn't even have enough will power to hold off one night."

"He'd been in stir five years. In that time you can build an awful thirst."

"If he was that thirsty, he'd have gotten drunk as soon as he got out. Why would he wait over twenty-four hours?"

Mosby shrugged. "It'll be easy enough to settle. I'll ask the autopsy surgeon to check his alcohol content. That'll show whether he was drunk or sober."

He turned to George Gannon. "Phone Al Buck at the Cole residence and see if that lab man is still there, Gannon. If he is, have him sent over here. Then phone headquarters and tell them to drag Doc away from his poker game again. I want this guy looked at before he's cut down."

Shayne waited around until the lab man and the medic arrived. The latter got there a moment before the lab man; so the lab technician quietly waited to one side until the doctor was finished. The medic seemed in an even more

irascible mood at being called from his game a second time than he had at the Cole home.

After examining the body, he said peevishly, "Strangulation. At least an hour ago, maybe two or three. Say between ten thirty and one thirty."

Shayne asked, "Can't you cut it any finer?"

"On the autopsy table tomorrow, maybe. If you can tell me what and when he last ate. By figuring the rate of digestion, we can pinpoint it within maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. But if you can't get me the dope on what he ate, don't expect a much better answer than I just gave you."

Lieutenant Mosby said, "We know he was alive at eleven thirty, because he was murdering his wife then. Even if he drove like a bat out of hell, he couldn't have gotten back here before about ten of twelve, or a quarter to at the earliest. The stakeout arrived about a quarter after and didn't hear any sound in the room. So he must have done it about midnight."

The medic's face slowly turned red. "You mean you called me out for a second time in one night when you already knew the answer!" he blared.

Mosby said pacifically, "Shayne here thinks it might have been rigged. I want to know if he was really drunk."

The doctor continued to glare at the lieutenant. "I can't tell that on the scene, genius. You expect me to dissect him right here? Get him down to the morgue and I'll tell you everything you want to know in the morning."

He stalked out of the room.

Mosby looked at Shayne. "Touchy, isn't he?"

"Maybe he was winning," Shayne said. "You need me any more, Lieutenant?"

"Not tonight," Mosby said. "You'll have to come down tomorrow and dictate a statement to sign. But I guess we're set for tonight."

Shayne went home and went to bed.

VI

AT ELEVEN THE next morning Shayne arrived at police headquarters. After dictating his statement of the night's previous events to a stenographer and signing it, he dropped by the police chief's office.

Chief Will Gentry looked up from some papers he was reading and gave the detective a cordial nod. "Morning, Mike. I was just looking over Sam Mosby's report about last night. He notes that you disagreed with his conclusions."

Shayne dropped his lanky frame into a chair. "I just can't see Trimble falling off the wagon so soon after he told me he was permanently through with the stuff, Will."

Gentry shuffled the papers in front of him until a different one was on top. "Here's the post mortem report. He had enough alcohol in his bloodstream to knock the average man out. It's a wonder he was able to stand on that chair."

Shayne frowned. "Were they able to fix the time of death any closer?"

After examining the report, Gentry said, "A little. Between ten thirty and twelve-thirty. That fits. Mosby figures he hanged himself around midnight."

The redhead gave his left earlobe an irritable tug. "I still don't like it, Will."

Gentry said patiently, "Just for the sake of argument, let's assume it *was* rigged, Mike. Look at the impossible time table the killer would have had to keep. At eleven thirty he breaks into the Cole home. He takes at least five minutes to strangle the woman, gets out again about eleven thirty-five. Mosby says it's a fifteen-minute drive from the Cole place to Trimble's house, even with the siren wide open. Give him the benefit of the doubt and get him there at ten of twelve. Twenty-five minutes later the stakeouts have the place covered, so he had to finish his business and be gone by then. You think he could get Trimble dead drunk and hang him in that time?"

"Maybe he knew Trimble was already drunk, so all he had to do was walk in and hang him."

Will Gentry grinned. "Now you're contradicting yourself. Your objection is based on the premise that Trimble wouldn't have fallen off the wagon on his own hook, isn't it?"

Shayne irritably ran a hand through his coarse red hair. "All right, I'm contradicting myself. I still don't like it, Will. I have a feeling that it's too pat."

"Well, you must have an alternate suspect, then. Who do you think rigged it?"

Shayne shrugged. "The obvious one comes to mind. Who's always the first suspect you consider when a woman is murdered?"

Gentry nodded. "I thought of that when I saw Mosby's note that you disagreed with him. We don't think you're a fool, Mike. We've got a pretty healthy respect for your opinion in matters like this around here. It occurred to me that if it was rigged, it was just the sort of frame a husband might pull to prevent us from looking any farther. There wouldn't be any point in pushing the blame onto Trimble if the real killer was someone we wouldn't automatically suspect anyway. So we checked Norbert Cole's alibi."

"And it stood up?"

Gentry shook his head. "He was supposed to be bowling. He hasn't showed to bowl with his team in five weeks."

Shayne's eyebrows went up. "He rigged an alibi?"

"Yeah," the chief said dryly. "But not for our benefit. For his wife's. For five weeks on the nights he was supposed to be bowling, he's been at the apartment of a TV writer named Lydia Mason. When we busted his first alibi, he broke down and confessed where he really was. She confirmed it. She says he was with her from nine until midnight. If he'd never missed bowling before, we might suspect that she was just covering for him. But with the pattern of his spending *every* bowling night at her place, it rings true."

Shayne gave his earlobe a thoughtful tug. "I guess that eliminates my prime suspect," he said reluctantly. "The only other possible is Marie's brother, Harlan Wright. And he's a cripple."

Gentry nodded. "We thought of him, too. Norbert Cole steered us Wright's way when he realized he was under suspicion. According to Cole, Wright hated his sister's guts. Cole says Harlan half suspected that it was really Marie instead of Trimble who pushed him down the steps five years ago. Cole claims Wright accused her of it on a number of occasions during arguments. But Wright couldn't even get up the stairs, let alone drive across town and lift a guy as heavy as Trimble up on a chair. We're closing the case as murder and suicide, Mike."

Shayne rose to his feet. "You do as you like, Will. But I think I'll poke around a bit more before I close my personal file on it. See you around."

Will Gentry frowned after the redhead as the latter walked out of the office.

By then it was nearing noon, and on a sudden impulse Shayne drove to South Portage. Entering *Swartz's Cafe*, he sat at the counter and ordered a blue plate special of roast beef, potato and vegetable.

As Trimble had told him, the food wasn't very good, but at least the place was clean. After finishing his meal, the redhead beckoned to the little blonde waitress who had waited on him.

Coming over, she said, "Dessert, sir?"

"No thanks," he said. "Did you work with Barry Trimble yesterday?"

"Yes," she said. "Wasn't that terrible what he did? Did you know him?" Then her eyes widened in sudden recognition. "Hey, you're Mike Shayne, aren't you?"

"Uh-huh," he admitted.

"Barry told us you dropped in on him yesterday. Gee, I never thought I'd meet a real celebrity. My name's Helen Gorka."

"How are you, Helen?" he said solemnly. "I suppose Barry ate his evening meal here last night, didn't he?"

"Sure. We sat down together. We were both on duty until eight,

so we took our dinner break at seven."

"Exactly at seven?"

She nodded. "Seven until seven-twenty. All we get is twenty minutes."

"What did he have to eat?"

Her eyebrows went up in surprise at the question. "Stuffed peppers, mashed potatoes, string beans. Yesterday's blue plate special. Why?"

"Just wondered." He stood up. "Thanks, Helen. You've been a big help."

"It's been a pleasure," she assured him.

There was a phone booth in the restaurant. Shayne used it to call police headquarters. He asked for Chief Gentry.

When the chief answered his phone, Shayne said, "This is Mike, Will. Last night the M.E. told me that if I could give him the time that Trimble last ate, and what he ate, he could pinpoint the time of death to within a few minutes."

"Yeah, they can do that," Gentry agreed. "They estimate it by the stage of digestion."

"Well, you can pass on to him that Trimble had stuffed peppers, mashed potatoes and string beans at seven o'clock and finished eating at seven-twenty."

Gentry said in a puzzled tone, "We already know about when he died, Mike."

"Pass it on anyway, will you?" Shayne said.

"All right, Mike," Gentry said in the irritatingly agreeable tone of a man humoring a friend he believes is entirely wrong. "I'll pass it on."

"You don't have to sound as though you're doing me a favor," Shayne growled. "I'm trying to do you one."

After hanging up, he mused for a moment, then pulled from his pocket the piece of paper on which he had written the Coles's address and phone number. Dropping another coin, he dialed the number. It was answered almost immediately by Harlan Wright.

"This is Mike Shayne," the detective said. "Mr. Cole there?"

"Oh, hello, Mr. Shayne. No, he isn't. He had to stop by the funeral parlor to make arrangements for Marie, then he was going to the TV station. Something about a contract termination because of Marie's death." There was a pause, then he said in a diffident voice, "I guess I was pretty hammy last night, breaking up like that. I'm embarrassed."

"Forget it," Shayne said. "Thanks for the information."

He hung up.

VII

THE TELEVISION STATION where *Breakfast with the Coles* originated was a modern, brick, one-story building. A receptionist told Shayne that Norbert Cole had just

come from the station manager's office, and she thought the detective could find him in staff writer Lydia Mason's office. She told him how to get there.

Shayne walked down a hall to the indicated door and found it open. Looking in, he saw Lydia Mason seated behind a typewriter desk. Norbert Cole sat smoking a cigarette and talking to her.

The woman looked up and said, "Why, hello, Mr. Shayne. Come on in."

Norbert Cole rose and gave Shayne a polite greeting. Shayne found a chair and lowered his long frame into it.

"I was looking for you, Cole," he said. "Your brother-in-law told me where to find you."

Cole reseated himself. "You're looking for me? Is anything the matter?"

"I just wanted to talk about last night."

Cole frowned. "I've already been over all that with the police, Shayne."

"I know," the redhead said dryly. "You had a pretty good alibi."

Cole's frown deepened and Lydia Mason blushed. "See here, Shayne," Cole said with a touch of anger. "Our personal affairs—"

"I'm not interested in your personal affairs," the redhead interrupted. "But in view of your alibi, I don't suppose either of you are terribly grief-stricken over Marie's death."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Cole demanded.

"Only that I don't feel I have to touch on the subject delicately out of respect for your feelings. I don't think Trimble killed Marie and I don't think he committed suicide. I think he was murdered, just as Marie was."

Norbert Cole's eyes narrowed and Lydia Mason looked shocked. In a faint voice she said, "What do you mean, Mr. Shayne?"

"I think the whole thing was rigged by someone who knew of the threat Trimble made five years ago. How many people does that include?"

After staring at the redhead for a time, Cole said slowly, "Only me and Lydia and Harlan. We never discussed it with anyone else. Is this an accusation?"

"Just a statement of fact. The police seem satisfied with your alibi, Cole."

A puzzled frown formed on Cole's face. "You can't be suspecting Harlan."

Shayne shrugged. "I understand you yourself suggested him to the police."

Norbert Cole looked a trifle shamefaced. "They seemed to be suspecting me, and I merely pointed out that Harlan had just as good a motive. It was a defensive move that I regretted as soon as I made it. Of course Harlan can't move out of that wheelchair."

"You sure?" Shayne inquired.

"How long has it been since he was examined by a doctor?"

Cole looked startled. "Why, a couple of years. Marie had a specialist re-examine him two years ago, I remember. But if you're implying that he might be able to walk, why would he spend his life pretending to be crippled?"

"Some people will do anything to keep from going to work," Shayne said. "And from all reports, Harlan isn't the most ambitious guy in the world. What was the name of that specialist?"

After corrugating his brow, Cole said, "Bacon. Dr. Clyde Bacon. I think he's in the Medical Building. You can easily check on it if I'm mistaken."

Shayne came to his feet. "That's all I wanted. Think I'll give Dr. Bacon a ring." Moving to the door, he paused and said in seemingly idle interest, "What are your plans, Cole, now that your wife's death ends *Breakfast with the Coles*?"

Cole said, "I really haven't thought about it yet. It's a little soon to think about anything but funeral arrangements."

Lydia Mason said, "Norbert used to work the night club circuit. He's really a very fine stand-up comedian."

"With the right material," Cole modestly admitted. "The trouble was getting good writers. If you pay what they're worth, you work for nothing yourself. If you buy gags from second-raters, you die before the audience. It's a rough racket."

"I suppose," Shayne said. "Well, thanks for the name of that doctor."

With a nod of goodbye, he continued on out of the office and retraced his way down the hall toward the receptionist. Spotting a door lettered STATION MANAGER, he hesitated, then, on sudden impulse, opened it and went in.

When a middle-aged secretary looked up at him inquiringly, he said, "Tell your boss I'd like to see him. The name is Michael Shayne."

The secretary's face registered surprised interest. "The private detective? Just a moment, Mr. Shayne."

Rising from her desk, she disappeared through a door marked: *Private*. A moment later she reopened it and said, "Mr. Carlson will see you now, Mr. Shayne."

IT WAS AFTER two P.M. when Mike Shayne left the television station. Returning to his office, he made a phone call to Dr. Clyde Bacon. When he hung up, there was a look of satisfaction on his face.

Lifting his desk phone, he said to Lucy, "Phone Will Gentry, will you, angel? Ask him to call me here as soon as he gets a report back from the autopsy surgeon on Barry Trimble."

"All right, Michael," Lucy said.

The phone call from Chief

Gentry came at four P.M. When Shayne answered, the chief sounded upset.

"You sure managed to louse up our whole case," Gentry complained. "It's wide open again."

"I thought it might be," Shayne said. "What did the autopsy surgeon say?"

"Trimble died between ten thirty and eleven P.M. A half hour to an hour *before* Marie Cole was murdered."

Shayne emitted a pleased grunt. "That's the clinching bit of evidence we needed, Will. Would you like to know who the real killer is now?"

"We'd prefer not to list both murders as unsolved homicides," the chief said sarcastically.

"I'll meet you at the Cole house in twenty minutes," Shayne said, and hung up.

Chief Gentry was already parked in front of the stucco house when Shayne arrived. As the redhead pulled in behind him, Gentry got out of his car and scowled in his direction.

Climbing from his car, Shayne said, "Why the sour expression, Will?"

"You hung up on me," Gentry said accusingly. "I phoned right back, but Lucy said you'd already left. You could have told me what this is all about."

"You'll find out inside," Shayne said. "Let's go."

Norbert Cole came to the door. He looked surprised to see Gentry, but he invited both men in politely enough. Lydia Mason was seated in the front room and Harlan Wright was in his wheelchair.

Shayne said, "I'm glad you're here, Miss Mason. It saves us the trouble of sending for you."

The brunette raised her eyebrows and Cole said, "What's this all about, Shayne?"

"A couple of murders," Shayne said. "The autopsy surgeon has been able to fix the exact time of Trimble's death. He died a half hour to an hour before Marie did."

Lydia Mason looked confused. "How could that be?" she inquired.

"His killer banked on the police accepting the obvious," Shayne said. "Maybe he knew that under ordinary circumstances it's difficult to fix time of death closer than within a couple of hours, even with an autopsy. Or maybe he figured they wouldn't bother having an autopsy when the situation was so obvious. At any rate, he set the scene at the rooming house first. He had to. He knew Marie's murder would only take minutes, but Trimble's demanded a lot of advance preparation. There wasn't time to begin working on Trimble after Marie was dead."

Norbert Cole asked, "What kind of advance preparation?"

"First he had to get him drunk. My guess is that he walked in on

Trimble with a gun in his hand and forced him to drink at gunpoint. Probably he made him down the stuff as fast as he could take it, and forced him to keep drinking until he passed out. Then he strung him up, came home and made the phone call to Marie."

"Came home?" Wright said.

"The phone call was made from right here," Shayne said. He pointed to the extension by the stairs. "Probably from that extension. He dialed the service number which makes your own phone ring, hung up, and as soon as the ringing stopped, indicating that Marie had answered upstairs, picked it up again and went into his act. It had to be that way because of the timing. He had to know that Marie had called me and he had to know what she said, because if she suspected it wasn't really Barry Trimble who phoned her, everything was off.

"He listened on the extension to her conversation with me. As soon as he was satisfied that the plot was working, he let the receiver dangle, walked out on the porch and broke the door pane. That was a fine touch, because I could hear the glass shatter in the background in the extension pickup."

"Who?" Norbert Cole asked tensely. He shifted his gaze to the man in the wheelchair.

Shayne gave his head a sardonic shake. "It won't work, Cole. I talked on the phone to Dr. Bacon. Harlan is permanently paralyzed from the waist down, and nothing in the world could ever make him walk again. Did Marie manage to get her bedroom door locked before you got upstairs? It wouldn't matter, of course. She would be so relieved at hearing your voice assuring her that it was only you, she'd unlock it again."

Cole's face had paled. "You're crazy, Shayne. You can't pin this on me."

"Yes I can," the redhead assured him. "You managed it beautifully, but it didn't quite work. Not wanting publicity because of your pending contract renewal was a particularly fine touch. You handled all the business arrangements for the team, so Marie didn't know your option wasn't being picked up. I talked to the station manager this afternoon. *Breakfast with the Coles* was leaving the air permanently in two weeks. You knew that Marie could make your life a hell, Cole? You knew what kind of woman she was. She'd never divorce you and every cent you earned would go to her. With Marie out of the way, you could go back to the night club circuit. You'd have Lydia to write your material for you. And you'd be free to live a life free of recrimination and petty tyranny. Even the brother would be off your neck."

Lydia Mason said in a faint voice, "Is this true, Norbert?"

"Sure it's true," Shayne shot at her. "Still want to furnish him with an alibi, Lydia?"

The woman was staring at Cole. "You said it was just to avoid bother," she whispered. "You said her first husband killed her, but it would be awkward to explain your movements. You swore to me you didn't have anything to do with it."

"Shut up, you little fool!" Cole yelled at her.

Will Gentry said, "I've heard enough. You're under arrest for murder, Cole." He took a ponderous step toward the man.

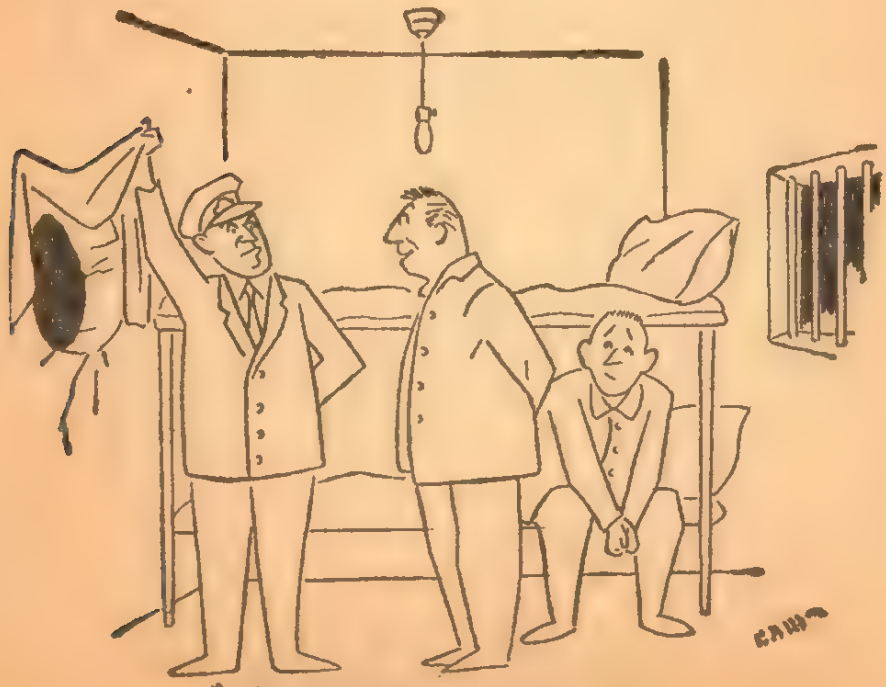
"Wait," Cole said, raising one palm. "I can prove I'm innocent. Look at this. If you'll just wait—"

Quickly Cole moved toward a desk against the wall and started to open a drawer. Shayne moved right behind him. The man's hand dipped into the drawer and came out again.

He was pivoting with a gun in his hand when the redhead's large fist crashed into his jaw. Shayne expertly plucked the gun from the air as it fell toward the floor, stepped aside and let Cole topple forward on his face. He tossed the pistol to Gentry.

"Probably the gun he held on Trimble to make him drink," he said.

Lydia Mason started to cry.



I'M TOUGH

by
DAVIS
DRESSER

The tough private eye—and Mike Shayne has often been called the toughest of them all—has come in for some good-natured ribbing of late by friends and opponents alike. But for a witty tour-de-force on that very theme it would be hard to surpass this satire-barbed short story by Mr. Dresser, the famed redhead's creator—the secret's out—Brett Halliday himself!

IT WAS LATE and it was raining. The streets were sleek, black and dismal. I was wet outside and dry inside. I went into a bar.

It was empty except for a thin man behind the mahogany. He was polishing glasses and he looked over his shoulder at me like he didn't want customers. I dripped water on his clean floor toward the bar. I said, "A double whiskey," to his back.

He turned, shaking his head. "Closing up, chum." He had a thin face shaped like the hatchet Lizzie Borden chopped up her mama with. And with funny ears sticking out on each side that looked like the shrivelled hands of a baby that was born dead.

© 1961, by Davis Dresser

I slid onto a stool and said, "A double whiskey."

He had a long thin nose and there was a glob of snot forming at the end of it. He shook his head and the end of his nose twitched and the snot started to fall. He reached up and swiped it off with his cloth and went back to polishing the glass. Only it didn't polish so good now. He said, "Closing up."

I got out my gat and laid it on the bar. He looked at the gat and then at my face, and then put down the glass and got a bottle of bonded stuff and a double shot-glass. He said, "Pardon me," and gurgled bourbon to the brim.

He left the bottle in front of me and turned away. I drank it. I gurgled in more bourbon and drank that. I heard the door open behind me and looked at the mirror behind the bar and saw her.

She was young. Maybe fifteen. Maybe sixteen. She wore a transparent yellow rain cape with a hood that she pushed back off her head. Her hair was pale gold, smooth and straight. Her face was white, and the rose-red lipstick made a gaping wound across her blank face. Her eyes were green as emeralds, slanted and shining as she looked at me.

I said, "Hi, kid," to her reflection in the mirror.

She said, "Hi," back to my reflection. Her eyelids drooped and listed slowly like the flick of a cat's tail. She moved up close behind me. She said, "Will you do something for me?"

I reached for the bottle. "Name it, kid."

She took in a deep breath, sibilant with a little hiss. I could see her teeth between swollen, scarlet lips, small white and sharply pointed. Her voice close behind my ear was a whisper. "Will you kill a man for me?"

I slid my gat back into my pocket. I turned on the stool and took a long look into those green eyes. They were young and they were hot and they promised me everything. I said, "For you . . . sure, babe."

She said, "Come on," and turned toward the door. I dropped a bill on the bar and followed her out.

Neon lights threw screaming colors across the rain-blackened streets. She left her hood down and walked through the lights and shadows and the rain, stony and detached.

I walked through the rain beside her and asked, "Your boy-friend?"

Her voice was small and clear and dry as she answered, "No."

I said, "Who, then?"

She said, "That doesn't concern you."

We went on through the night and the rain. We reached the corner of Broadway at 42nd. There weren't any pedestrians.

There was a black-coated cop directing traffic at the intersection. His back was to us.

The wind tore at our bodies and the rain lashed at our faces. There was only an old man selling pencils on the corner. A very old man. His hair was white and his beard was white and his slack mouth trembled as the cold rain beat at it.

She lifted her hand and pointed a finger at the old man and said, "That's him."

I looked into her green eyes and she looked back and it was like there was a flame between us that the raindrops couldn't put out.

I said, "Okay, babe," and pulled my gun and shot him between the eyes.

He fell flat on his face. His bony fingers scrabbled a moment among the scattered pencils. The cop thought it was a back-fire and kept his back turned. I nudged the old man over with my toe to make sure he was dead. I knelt beside him. His rheumy old eyes were glazing. His lips parted. He muttered, "That bitch," and then he died.

I got up and turned around. She was gone. I was alone with the night and the wind and the rain . . . and with a dead man.

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Please print **MS-91**

SLEEP NO MORE

He was afraid to sleep . . .

for death stalked his dreams.

By MANN RUBIN

WHEN RICHARD MOTT opened his eyes the morning after, he found the drab, cheerless face of Emma hovering over him, pin-curls and all. Every year, he thought, his wife looked more and more like the M-G-M lion.

© 1961, by Mann Rubin

"Good morning," he mumbled, turning his head away.

"Who is Linda Rhodes?" she roared.

The words hit him like a bucket of ice-water. He sat bolt upright, tingling.

"Who?"

"You heard me, you cheat. Only save your lies. I already know. She's the new secretary that started in your office two months ago, isn't she?"

"What about her?" asked Richard, his mouth dry, a sinking, nauseous feeling rumbling across his stomach.

"I've got news for you. Her name's mud in this town. Before I'm finished she'll wish she never laid eyes on you."

Richard cringed inwardly at the threat. He thought of Linda—sweet, luscious Linda with hair like spun gold and the softest, warmest lips. The ache in his stomach tightened into a fist.

"I don't know what you're talking about." He reached for his robe, telling himself he'd have to keep calm and play it casual. But it wasn't going to be easy.

"Don't you?" cried Emma sarcastically. "And I suppose you never heard of Cabin Number Twenty-two at the *Seaview Motel* in Santa Monica, where you made love to her for three hours last night while I thought you were at a Kiwanis meeting?"

"How did . . . ?"

"Fortunately, dear husband, you still have one habit I find most revealing and rewarding, even after fourteen years of marriage."

"I talked in my sleep again."

"Raved is more like it. Thanks to you and your dreams I had a blow-by-blow description of your charming little rendezvous. You supplied everything from the name of her French perfume to the number of times she called you her 'Tutti-Frutti Lover-Man'. Want any more?"

"That won't be necessary," said Richard weakly. "If you'll excuse me I'll go shave."

"Well, hurry it up. Because when you drive to work this morning I'm going along. And I'm staying right with you until everyone in your office knows what a cheap, home-wrecking hussy they have working for them." Emma's voice droned on like a broken air-raid siren.

Grimly, Richard studied her, silently comparing the chewed-up expression of her harsh-featured face to the scented, fragile memory of Linda Rhodes. It was like weighing an iron frying pan against the moon. Something had to be done quickly.

All during his shave the dull, knotted feeling he'd experienced when Emma had first mentioned Linda's name stayed with him. Damn his sleep-talking! What a fool he'd been to forget this malady, this albatros that had hung

around his neck ever since he could remember. Even as a child, whenever he experienced some unusual, stimulating event such as having a birthday, seeing a circus or engaging in a fight with another kid, he was sure to relive it in his sleep the following night.

Always the pattern was the same. Detail for detail, no matter if it were an act of pain or pleasure, he would broadcast to the world every sensation and thought that had swept through his mind during the actual episode. He was cursed with total recall. On the following morning he could usually count on a member of his family—or a college roommate in later years—to describe verbatim the experience that haunted his dreams.

Marriage had not changed this idiosyncrasy. At first Emma thought it cute to recite to him over breakfast one of his nocturnal adventures, describing with relish some current business problem he had kept from her or a golf-score he was ashamed to acknowledge.

But as his life with her became more routine, more colorless he had stopped conversing in his sleep and she no longer teased him with the dreary exposures of his dreams.

Until Linda, and his most disastrous babblings so far.

He dried his face with a towel, then almost automatically applied shaving lotion, the kind which Linda had romantically assured him made him smell like a swashbuckling sea-captain instead of a stock broker. He smiled in anticipation of the many sweet voyages that lay ahead for both of them.

"Where are you?" screeched Emma from downstairs.

Richard ignored her, his mind refusing to give up its cargo of cozy Linda images. They had been so careful in their meetings, so wary of prying eyes that even after two months no one in his office had any suspicion that they were having an affair.

At first Linda had been frightened, cold, indifferent, but his wooing had been so ardently unswerving that finally, last night, had come the triumph he had hoped for. She had consented to spend the night with him. For Richard, it was the purest, most perfect victory of his life. So perfect that he had been betrayed into reassembling each priceless moment in his dreams.

Thus, in recalling the heights of his ecstasy, he had unwittingly jeopardized all of their plans for the future. Worse, Linda's whole reputation stood on the brink of humiliation.

"I'm warning you," threatened Emma from below. "If you're not down here in five minutes, I'm going to your office by myself."

He increased the speed of his dressing, knowing full well that

unless he stopped Emma before she put a foot out the door everything worthwhile and fresh in his life would be trampled into dust within an hour. Nothing mattered but Linda and himself. Their beautiful, new love had to be preserved at all costs.

Descending the stairs a minute later, he got his answer. The phone began to ring in the living room and he heard Emma hurrying to answer it, all set to play the poor, martyred wife before her bridge-playing, gossipy friends. Richard held his breath.

"Hello. Who? No, he's not here. He left about twenty minutes ago . . . How should I know if he's at his office or not . . . What's that? He owes you the money. Why don't you ask him yourself!" She slammed the receiver down, angry at being cheated out of her gossip and self-pity, and waddled back to the kitchen.

When Richard came in, she was bent over the stove waiting for the coffee to percolate. She was dressed in street clothes, ready for departure.

"Who was that on the phone?" he asked, striving to sound casual.

"The Acme Finance Company," she barked without turning. "Seems you're two weeks behind in a loan payment. I was wondering where you got the money for that gold bracelet you gave her last night."

"Did I mention that too?"

"You talked a blue streak. I have enough on Miss Linda Rhodes to disgrace her from here to China. And that's just what I intend to do."

Richard didn't budge from his position near the pot-rack. He tried to keep his voice steady. "Where did you tell the Acme people I was?"

"You heard me. I couldn't be bothered. I told them you left twenty minutes ago, and they had

my permission to try you at the office."

Richard checked with the kitchen clock. "Twenty minutes. That means I left here supposedly at five minutes to nine. And if I take the short-cut I'll arrive at my office at my usual time. What a perfect alibi."

"Huh?" said Emma. She was pouring out a cup of coffee that looked very weak. "How much sugar do you want in this?" she asked.

It was the last dull question she was ever to ask in a life filled with dull questions. For at that moment her husband came up behind her with a waffle-iron and struck her a savage blow across the skull.

"One lump, I think, will be quite sufficient," said Richard softly, gazing down at her sprawled, silent body.

She stopped breathing even before he'd wiped his fingerprints from the murder weapon and laid it carefully on the floor at her side. Eight minutes later he had taken the few bills from her purse, scattered the rest of the contents around the kitchen, broken the latch on the back door to make it appear that the thief had had an easy time entering, and sped away in his car without being spotted by any of the neighbors. He arrived at his brokerage office with an air of confident elation, as if he had no doubt at all that the market would climb a hundred points in the course of the day.

The morning went well. The Acme Finance office called him a few minutes after he was settled at his desk. They mentioned their conversation with his wife, apologized for annoying him in the midst of work and asked when they could expect their payments. He promised to get a check off immediately.

Next a deal he'd been negotiating for several months was concluded in the most satisfactory imaginable fashion, giving him a larger commission than he had originally estimated. And to make the morning even more special, he was able to get Linda alone in his office for a long, delicious three minutes.

"How daring you've gotten, Mr. Mott," she whispered breathlessly, pulling away reluctantly from his embrace.

"You haven't seen anything yet."

"Oh, darling, I'm happy. Are you?"

"This has been the happiest morning of my life," he assured her.

They kissed again, and then she was gone, her green eyes twinkling with promise and desire.

Afterwards he sat and planned his strategy for when the police arrived. He never felt more in control of a situation. Only the slight prickling across his stomach,

which he first experienced during his early morning encounter with Emma, marred his otherwise perfect day.

He attributed the pain to no breakfast, and decided it might prove helpful when the police came. Like an accomplished actor he would use his distress as a prop to make his first shock of grief seem wholly natural and convincing.

He was completely confident that he could handle the police. His friends and business associates would present no problem. It was only himself he feared—himself asleep, dreaming, talking, confessing. The first twenty-four hours would be the most dangerous. Tonight it was imperative that he sleep alone, isolated, with no one close enough to eavesdrop on his telltale dreams.

Once that first troubled sleep was behind him, the memory of Emma's death would be far less likely to break through the walls of his sleeping mind.

He spotted the two detectives precisely at five o'clock. One small and chinless, the other large and rumpled. They crossed toward his office like two pallbearers carrying an invisible coffin. *This is it,* he thought, feeling the knot inside him explode into a hundred smaller knots.

"Mr. Mott? Mr. Richard Mott?" They were standing just inside his doorway.

"Yes?" His expression was innocent, guileless. "Can I help you?"

Complete in the Next Issue

RETURN OF A DEAD MAN

A Short Novel of Unbearable Suspense

by HELEN McCLOY

Fifteen years had changed him, given him a new, mysteriously shielded identity. But dark violence can strip away all masks. A superb suspense novel by a writer with a brilliant mastery of her craft.

"I'm afraid we've got bad news for you, sir. It's your wife. She's been murdered. She was found by a neighbor just before noon."

He let a pencil fall dramatically from his fingers, his stomach somersaulting on cue, the blood draining from his face. What a performance! He tried to rise, startled by his limplessness, the burning sensations in his stomach suddenly recurred, running pell mell through him.

"God God! I—"

He staggered, swayed, and would have fallen if one of the detectives hadn't reached out to support him. "The poor guy. You can't blame him. A shock like that can—"

THE NEXT FEW minutes were blurred, unfocused, a rollercoaster of sounds and movements. His ability to feign such deep, searing agony, amazed him. His whole body seemed on fire. Several times he felt himself to be on the verge of fainting.

After a time he opened his eyes. The first dizziness had passed. A dozen office faces peered at him from the doorway. He was lying flat on his back and a doctor from across the hall was examining him.

"Emma . . ."

"Shhh," said the chinless detective. He and the doctor stepped to a corner of the room and conferred. A moment later the detective picked up the phone, and dialed a number.

Richard tried to sit up but the doctor's hand gently restrained him. He felt numbed, light-headed.

"But it's Emma. She's dead. I want to know what happened."

"Easy, Mr. Mott. You'll get all the information in a couple of days."

"But I want to know *now*," he pleaded. "I have every right to know."

"Sorry, you're in no condition to talk. Just lie quiet until the ambulance gets here."

"What ambulance? What are you talking about? I want to go home."

"You can't," said the doctor, exerting a slight but firm pressure on his shoulders. "You're a very sick man."

Richard struggled frantically. More arms gripped him, held him securely. Were they crazy? Had he overplayed the part of a stricken husband? What had gone wrong?

"I have to be alone tonight. Don't you understand? She's dead. My wife's dead. I feel awful."

"You should. With that fever you're running I don't know how you ever managed to come to your office. I'm afraid we'll have to operate immediately."

"Operate?"

"Your appendix. I imagine your stomach's been like a blast furnace all day." The doctor nodded

sympathetically and picked up his medical bag.

"No, you're wrong," protested Richard, aware suddenly that the heavy dull throbbing he had so carefully nurtured and fed upon all day was now something white-hot and knifelike against his stomach wall. Why hadn't he noticed before? The jabs of pain were excruciating.

"I tell you I'm in the best of health," he shouted. "It's the shock, that's all. All I need is a good night's sleep. Alone, by myself. In the morning . . . I'll be quite all right."

He felt the needle stab his arm, and the words froze on his lips.

"A sedative to relieve the pain, and help you sleep," the doctor whispered soothingly.

Richard pulled away, struggling fiercely. "But I don't want to sleep. I can't sleep! Emma . . ."

"What a brave, suffering man," someone whispered

"What a loyal husband," said someone else.

Richard looked up wildly. They were all staring, all sympathizing. He had won. No one doubted his innocence. Victory was in his grasp. Linda was in his grasp. He was free.

"Mustn't sleep . . . Mustn't sleep . . ."

He saw Linda's slender form framed in the doorway. She was biting her lip, concerned, worried. She had never seemed more beautiful. He blinked.

The two detectives were leading him back to the couch. Linda's face never left him. How different she was from Emma . . . Emma . . . Why was he thinking of poor dead Emma? He blinked again to shut out her image. She stayed, grew larger.

He closed his eyes tighter. For awhile there was only blackenss, chill, impenetrable.

Then he began to dream . . .

Next Month

THE FATAL MESSAGE — A *MIKE SHAYNE* NOVELET

By BRETT HALLIDAY

The dog with the curly tail

A dazzling crime thriller in miniature . . .
by one of England's mystery story greats.

JULIAN SYMONS

COMMISSIONAIRE William Jones stood outside the offices of British Commercial Pictures in Deal Street, just off Piccadilly, and considered the scene and people before him with his usual air of expectancy. Behind Jones' gold braid and old-fashioned, Victorian mustache beat a romantic heart. He had taken this job in the hope that he would be able to obtain promotion, and perhaps a screen career, by some notable act of gallantry like rescuing a film starlet in distress.

In six months nothing remotely like that had come his way, but he never ceased to hope. Jones twirled his mustache and looked up and down the street. Nothing exciting met his gaze.

On the other side of the street some valuable article of jewelry was being taken out of the barred window of Meyerhold's. And nearby a liver-colored toy spaniel with a curly tail and a collecting box round its neck sat on a chair while its owner ground out a tune on a barrel organ. Just outside Brace and Stone, the tailors, a man sat in a car with its motor running.

And there went Mr. Francis Quarles's progress down Deal

Street. He was such a large and impressive-looking man, he carried his bulk with such an air of authority, and he was followed by such a very small dog. Jones observed with admiration, as he had done on other days when Mr. Quarles took his dog Pinch for a walk, the animal's exuberant but unquestionably very genuine devotion to his master.

Pinch followed two paces behind Quarles, never deviated for an instant, even at the call of lamp posts, from his master's course. Then something happened which made Jones forget all about the big man with the little dog.

A man walked quickly out of the jeweller's shop. Out in the street he began to run. In the shop doorway appeared the figure of Hans Meyerhold, who shouted in stentorian voice: "Stop thief! Police! *Stop him!* Help!"

Jones saw his chance. The man ran past the barrel organ owner and had just reached the door of the waiting car when Jones was on him. His tackle was expert.

The man was tall, fair and aristocratic-looking, and he expressed his indignation forcibly. "An absolutely unprovoked assault. You'll pay for this, my man —or your employers will."

Jones appealed to Meyerhold. "You called out 'Stop thief,' isn't that right?"

Meyerhold nodded solemnly. "Perfectly right." To the policeman who had come up he explained. "This man came in and looked at some stones. I take a diamond necklace out of the window for him. He had not left the shop a moment before I see that for my necklace he has substituted paste."

Jones noticed that Quarles had returned and was pushing his way through the crowd.

Meyerhold greeted him joyfully and the policeman said: "Hello, Mr. Quarles. You're right on the spot."

The driver of the car was dark and spoke with a slight drawl. "Look here, Arnold, this is a lot of nonsense, but the quickest way out of it is to let them search you."

He turned to Jones. "Forget that stuff about assault. You were doing what you thought was right. But you can testify that if my friend did take this necklace it must be in his possession now. He's had no chance to get rid of it."

Jones agreed unwillingly. This business of being a hero didn't seem quite as simple as he had thought.

"Just to keep you company, Arnold, I'll let myself be searched, too," said the dark man. He got out of the car.

"Seems fair enough," said the policeman.

Meyerhold exploded. "It is not fair enough. He changed over my necklace, and if he has got rid of

it now it is by some devil's trick."

"I've changed my mind, officer," Arnold said. "I'll not only permit myself to be searched, I *demand* to be searched, and if you don't find a diamond necklace on me I'll ask you to draw the obvious conclusion. It wouldn't be the first time a jeweller had tried to fake a robbery and frame an innocent customer."

Meyerhold's face was purple with fury. The policeman asserted his authority. "Let's keep calm. If you'll come along to Mr. Meyerhold's shop perhaps we can get this straightened out. Would you care to come along, Mr. Quarles?"

But Francis Quarles was not paying attention to the two men or the policeman. He was looking at Pinch, who was some yards up the street, and was behaving towards the liver-colored toy spaniel with an affectionate playfulness embarrassing both to the spaniel and its owner, who was now pushing his barrel organ up the street.

"The collecting-box has gone from round its neck," Quarles said. Turning to Jones he went on: "I'd suggest that you perform another of your excellent flying tackles on that organ-grinder and then open that attache case he is holding so tightly."

Jones dashed forward and dived again. The organ grinder measured his length on the pavement. The attache case flew from his grasp and burst open. Out of it fell a necklace which glittered in the light. Out of it also came—a liver-colored toy spaniel with a curly tail.

AFTERWARDS, Francis Quarles said to Jones. "Meyerhold will certainly give you a substantial reward for the recover of his necklace. And I shall speak to my friend, Sir Alan MacIntyre, of British Commercial Pictures, about you. That tackle would look splendid on the screen."

Jones, a modest young man, blushed. "I still don't understand what happened."

Quarles explained: "There were two dogs. It has all been prearranged. The thief dropped the necklace into the collecting box, and at a word from the organ grinder the two dogs changed places. They'd been trained to do so."

"But how did you know it wasn't the same dog?"

"Pinch told me." And when Jones looked mystified, Quarles continued: "When Pinch walked down Deal Street with me he paid no attention to the toy spaniel. When we came back he rushed away from me to go after it. Can't you guess why?"

A light dawned on Jones. "The second dog was—"

"Precisely. The female of the species, my dear young man, is irresistible to Pinch. He left me for her and neatly solved a puzzle."

(Continued from other side)

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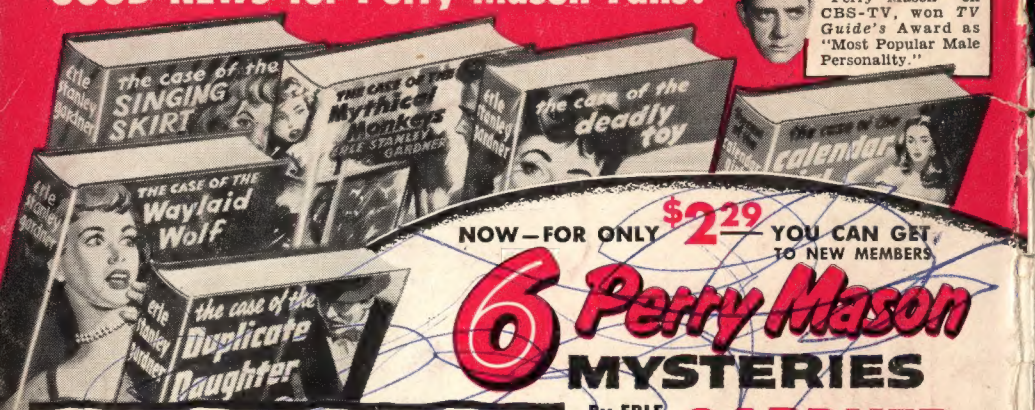
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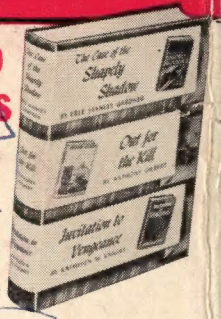

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